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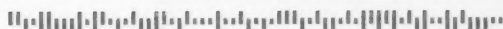
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November/December 2012

"To assess the performance of journalism... to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession, and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent."

—from the founding editorial, 1961



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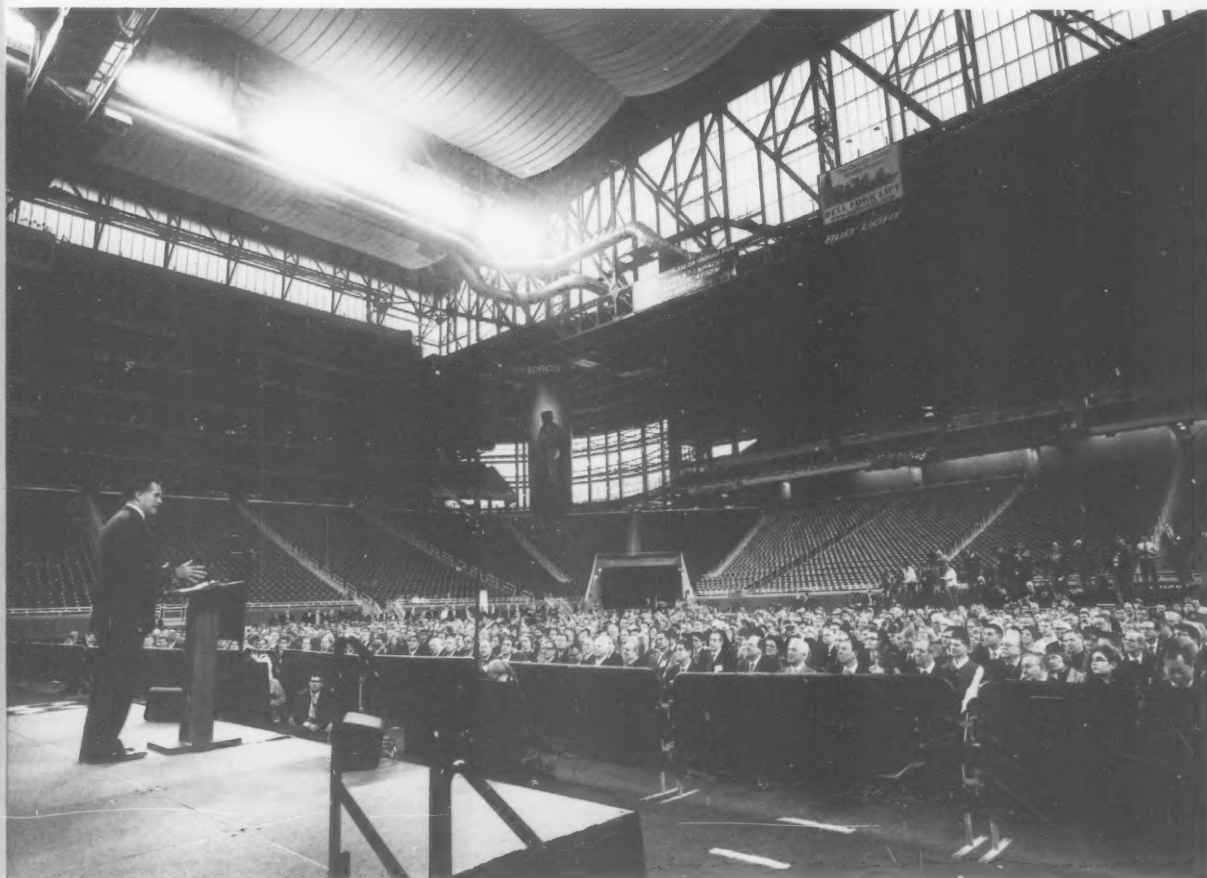
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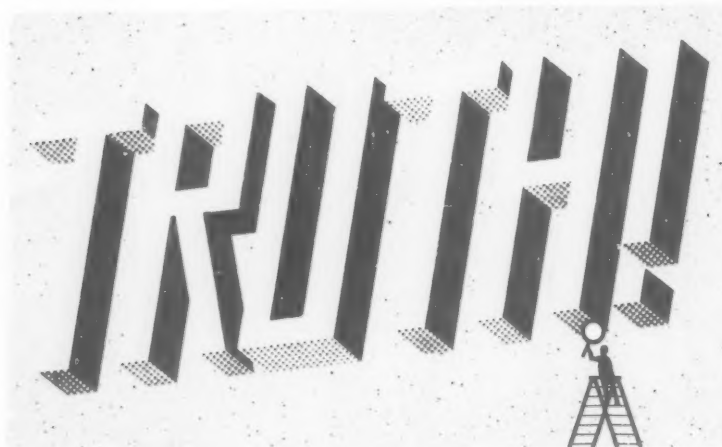
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Opening Shot



In October, Columbia J-School joined with BagNewsNotes, an almost decade-old site devoted to analyzing media images, for a discussion about visual coverage of the presidential race. Photojournalists, scholars, and audience members “read” a selection of news photos from this year, including the one above. The idea was to tease out layers of meaning in the images, to explore the (perhaps competing) narratives that the photographers and politicians were trying to convey. The danger in this kind of exercise is that, as one participant said, “Everyone reads into pictures what they want to,” and it’s easy to become caught up in “meaning” that is, well, meaningless. In other words, has the photo captured the candidate in a moment of anxious soul-searching? Or was it just bad lighting? Was the photographer, perhaps unconsciously, expressing her political preference, or was she just stuck in a press pen and unable to get a better angle? Exegetical risks aside, the salon’s larger message was an important one that tends to get overlooked: Voters are flooded with persuasive images; they need to think like critics if they are to discern the reality from the spin. **CJR**

Seeing is believing? In February, as Mitt Romney was trying to project himself as the inevitable GOP nominee, he gave a speech at Ford Field in Detroit. The photo was mocked by opponents as evidence that Romney was too unpopular to fill the space. In actuality, the original venue for the sold-out event was too small, and it was moved to the stadium because of security concerns.



Hard truths

What is the future of political factchecking?

As the presidential campaign wound down, it became clear that the media's factchecking effort, which played a more prominent role in the coverage than it had in any previous election, is at something of a crossroads. Thanks to the truth-squadding—by teams at PolitiFact and FactCheck.org, as well as individual reporters around the country—we learned, among other things, that Mitt Romney lied about President Obama's changes to the

welfare law; that President Obama was misleading about what Romney's Medicare plan would cost seniors; and that Paul Ryan was hypocritical when he criticized Obama for not adopting the recommendations of the Simpson-Bowles deficit-reduction committee. (CJR got its licks in, too, with our Swing States Project, which after the election will become the United States Project.)

And yet, tangible results of all this good work—in the form of contrition from the campaigns, public outrage, etc.—were less evident than one might hope. By last summer, the debate among the media about the efficacy of factchecking had arrived at this question: Are we in a “post-truth” era? At times during the campaign it seemed that the candidates could lie with impunity, because their supporters either don't care, don't know (they consume only partisan media), or they believe the factcheckers are themselves untrustworthy.

This question gave rise to a number of suggested

responses by the press, including that reporters have boilerplate rebuttals on hand to drop into their stories as needed to counter the repeated lie. But perhaps the most useful suggestion was this: Everyone needs to be more realistic about what factchecking alone can accomplish. It can't, for instance, make politicians do what they've concluded isn't in their best interest. It can't reduce political polarization. It can't change human psychology and overcome deep-seated bias.

More fundamentally, the really important questions confronting our nation are too complex for the swift, unambiguous judgments that are the coin of the factchecking realm.

For instance, are the following statements true or false?

- We will have to raise taxes to keep Medicare solvent.
- Teachers' unions are a major obstacle to improving our education system.
- Reinstating Glass-Steagall would prevent a repeat of the 2008 financial crisis.

The relevant facts do not all sit comfortably on one side or the other of these issues. And what voters believe about such claims, and the policy implications that come with them, will have more impact on the republic than Mitt Romney's pants-on-fire assertion that President Obama ended the work requirement for welfare recipients.

Parsing these assertions in a way that helps the public decide what to believe requires both the factchecker's prosecutorial mindset *and* the reporter's knack for judiciously assembling context. The goal is not a yay-or-nay

verdict, but an intellectually honest analysis that includes the historical record, is clear about what is unknowable or genuinely open to differing interpretations, and yet doesn't shy away from concluding that the weight of evidence favors one side or the other.

Toward that end, newsrooms should free factchecking from its specialized ghetto—the sidebars and boxes and special factchecking columns—and let its spirit infect every beat. The idea, as *The New York Times's* David Leonhardt put it in an interview, is for the “analysis of the legitimacy of political claims” to be “at the core of what we do.”

It's hardly a radical idea. Journalism has always purported to be about uncovering facts in the service of discovering truth—or at least as much of the truth as it's possible to know. If the political culture is “post-truth,” then journalism must be more than just a presenter of facts; it must be truth's dogged—and vocal—advocate. **CJR**



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Fleurs du mal

Very compelling argument and well-stated, Clay Shirky ("Failing Geometry" *CJR*, September/October). Traditional media's "original sin" (re: the Web) was to make themselves in their own image, while the alpha geeks building the Web saw things differently. Time is the new currency, and the Web's gift to humanity is that of saving time. Legacy media is just the opposite; it's about an infrastructure that actually wastes time, and until we get that right, we're all simply chasing our tails. The three-legged stool is a great analogy, but the Web views it as inefficient across-the-board. As a result, it routes around the media-company leg, so the whole thing collapses.

We are in an amazing time in communications history, a time when a single individual can compete for attention alongside vaunted institutions and actually have a hope of getting through the clutter. Content marketing has lowered the over-reaching beacons of mass media by raising those of people who used to pay for the privilege of renting space next to the content of the few.

We're deep in a transition, and nobody has even come close to figuring out exactly where it's going or what to do. This is especially true because there is little incentive for big players to experiment. 2012 will go down as a record revenue year for local broadcasters, for example, and agencies representing the biggest ad dollars have no desire to whack their own fattened calf. So I predict it'll get a whole lot worse before the blossoms of tomorrow begin to bloom.

Terry Heaton

*Author, Reinventing Local Media
Dallas, TX*

Another media unit probably worth restructuring is national journalism. The public may well be saying that we don't need multiple formal municipal journalism outlets; one local TV station and website is enough for various regions. The national carrying capacity for news



'Time is the new currency, and the Web's gift to humanity is that of saving time.'

is probably something like four national papers/operations, and a single small regional operation (like WSYR in Syracuse) for the local news.

Let's not forget that the people formerly called sources now can tell their stories and blow their whistles on popular platforms like YouTube or a special-interest blog. The forces of disintermediation have claimed reporters, but people interested in telling a story will still find people who want to know what's going on. *Plus ça change.*

The endgame likely sees local journalism devolving to those with the strongest vested interest. Civic watchdogging will suffer until enough critical mass and unrest develops à la the Occupy movement. Stories will be told, institutions will adapt.

*Stephen Masiclat
Syracuse, NY*

OK go

Re: "Made for you and me" by Michael Meyer, *CJR*, September/October)

I remember a few years ago when the *Columbia Journalism Review* called the *Daily Oklahoman* a newspaper in reverse—actually sucking the intelligence right out of the reader—and you were right. This Land is putting the intelligence back where it belongs—with new readers.

*Jay Casey
Tulsa, OK*

This Land gives us meatier and more substantial journalism than this area has typically offered. I am so thrilled with their success and so proud to have read it from its very first issue! Go, Michael! Go, This Land!

*Crystal Kline
Tulsa, OK*

Not better than Ezra

Thank you, Matt Welch, for an excellent summation of what makes Ezra Klein one of our better policy advocates and analysts ("The boy in the bubble," *CJR*, September/October). What I find so refreshing about Klein is his dedication to the full understanding of the matters he discusses, without indulging in the greatest downfall of most politicians with little life experience outside of academic circles; he avoids the personal and anecdotal in favor of solid research. Unlike so many other bloggers and columnists whose reliance on self-reference and occasional pithy quotes (likely Googled), Klein takes the time to build his case, present complex issues effectively, and provide plenty of references and links to back up his assertions.

*Jeffrey M. Ellis
Los Angeles, CA*

I've been an admirer of Ezra Klein's work since the early days of the debate on health reform. As a proponent of the single-payer Canadian system, I hope I

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can be counted among those who urged him to study the healthcare systems of other nations.

But having done his homework on health systems that are both cost-effective and humane, Klein joined the "political feasibility" gang, allowing Barack Obama and Max Baucus to keep

single-payer off the table, accepting the insurer-dominated and hopelessly inequitable Affordable Care Act. Would Klein, the objective, even-handed reporter, have used the political-feasibility argument against the suffragists, against the civil rights movement? Let's hope not.

Given his smarts and current

megaphone, I wish he'd stand up and holler, "We Americans are paying twice as much for healthcare as taxpayers in other countries, yet we tolerate poorer outcomes, and leave millions uninsured. How can we be so dumb?"

Harriette Seiler
Louisville, KY

NOTES FROM OUR ONLINE READERS

IN SEPTEMBER, ANN FRIEDMAN WROTE HER WEEKLY #REALTALK ADVICE column about becoming a successful freelancer, suggesting that aspirants amass clips by writing for free for websites (their own and others). Readers took issue:

The only place you should ever write for free is your own site, never for anyone else. I am extremely disappointed that CJR would promote such an idea, and while Ms. Friedman is a fine journalist, I am equally disappointed that CJR has someone in the "midst of her own freelance experiment" offering advice to freelancers. No veteran freelancer would ever tell someone to write for free. Freelancing is not a game. It's a business. It should be treated as such, which means getting paid for your work, not giving it away. —Jen A. Miller

While I don't know Ann Friedman, I do know a LOT of extremely successful freelancers. Perhaps asking them to write a column on how to freelance would have been a wiser choice. ... Writing for free and sending out those links is basically going to get you nowhere. No editors worth their salt are impressed that you posted an item on your blog or wrote something for a content mill for \$10. —Susan Ladika

Friedman responded:

Do I wish even very inexperienced writers could get paid for every single thing they write that's not on their personal website? Yes. But this column isn't called #hopesanddreamstalk, it's called #realtalk.

ARTHUR O. SULZBERGER, 1926–2012

The New York Times publisher's many achievements have been well lauded, so here's a look at his beginnings, courtesy of Gay Talese (*The Kingdom and the Power*, 1969):

The new publisher was a friendly, unostentatious young man who had curly, dark hair, smoked a pipe, wore Paul Stuart suits, and always said hello to whoever was in the elevator. If he bore any physical resemblance to his distinguished-looking father, it was not obvious to those in the newsroom: He seemed more an Ochs than a Sulzberger. He had his mother's dark, penetrating eyes, and he had Adolph Ochs's large-lobed ears that turned up at the bottom. He was of average height, square-shouldered and solidly built, yet lean enough to fit into the Marine Corps uniform that he had worn more than a decade ago, and his hair was sufficiently close-cropped to pass almost any military inspection. There was no regimental quality about him, however, not even a trace of rigidity, and in this sense he was unlike the publishers who had preceded him. Adolph Ochs had been a model of formality, a starched figure most comfortable at a distance, a self-made man of Victorian presence who rarely lowered his guard in public. While Arthur Hays Sulzberger and Orvil Dryfoos were more mellow and genteel, they were nearly always pressured by the tight strings of the title that they had acquired through marriage. Punch Sulzberger was different—he had been *born* to the title, he had grown up within *The Times*, had skipped through its corridors as a child. He was never awed by the great editors that he met there, for they had always smiled at him, seemed happy to see him, treated him like a little prince in a palace, and he developed early in life a sunny, amiable disposition.

I have been reading Ezra Klein, Daily Kos, and Andrew Sullivan for years. Not because I always agree with them, but because I thought they were the ones making the best arguments. They seemed to care about facts and used them to create their arguments. When history, facts, or conventional wisdom was against them, they dealt with that honestly and tried to give you multiple sides of the argument. I agreed with Klein that, politically, a single-payer option was not going to happen, but I think Klein's big fault was in making the single-payer option too easy for Republicans to deal away without incurring a political cost. Consumers should be able to choose a public option.

Colleen Mahaney
Roswell, GA

Corrections

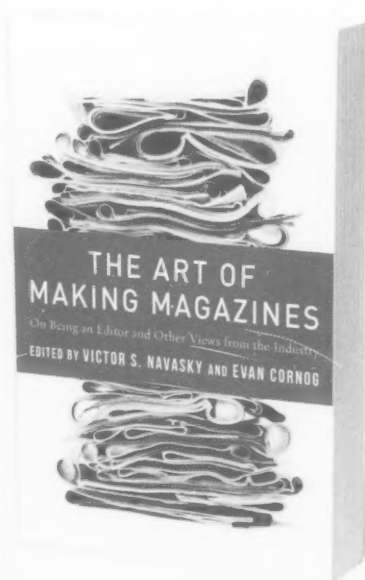
In our chart "What's the best model for digital news business?" (September/October), in which we compare the fates of three news startups (the Chicago News Cooperative, the Bay Citizen, and the Texas Tribune), we mistakenly attributed a quote dismissing the Texas Tribune as "inside baseball" to *Texas Monthly*. In fact, the quote came from the *Texas Observer*. *Texas Monthly* actually has a partnership with the Texas Tribune.

There were two errors in our profile of Bruce Brugmann ("Alternative ending," September/October): *SF Weekly* was purchased by New Times Media in 1995, not 1999; and the 2005 merger of New Times Media and Village Voice Media *did* involve 17 free alt-weeklies, just not the largest ones.

In the same issue, a credit in The Lower Case should have been the *Bellingham Herald*, not the Bellingham Post. And we misspelled Ben Ilfeld's name in "By the People," a story about Ilfeld's Sacramento Press.

Our sincere apologies to all. CJR

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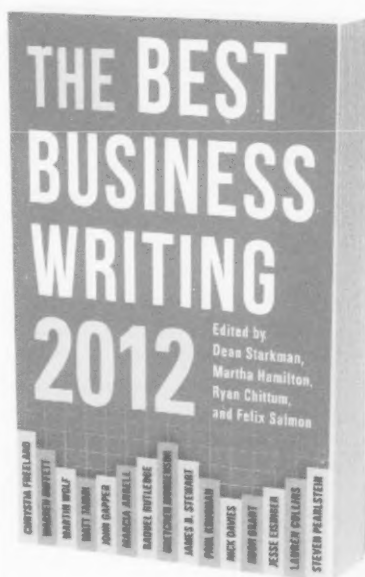
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Currents



Obsessions Talk to the hand

Eight years ago, the *Chicago Tribune* put the halogen searchlight of public attention on an age-old international media conspiracy—an inside joke among journos to try to sneak a certain seemingly descriptive but actually meaningless phrase past their editors.

"It was as if an occult hand"—or some derivation of it—has appeared in publications from the *Los Angeles Times* to *The Bangkok Post* since its first use in a 1965 article in the (now-defunct) *Charlotte News*. As the *Tribune's* James Janega described it, Joseph Flanders wrote, "It was as if an occult hand had reached down from above and moved the players like pawns upon some giant chessboard." Flanders's colleagues loved the phrase so much, they resolved to sneak it into their own copy. Over the years, those reporters moved on to other papers, and word of the Order of the Occult Hand spread. (Janega's article has a nice list of places where the occult hand has popped up; a Wikipedia entry has one, too. Definitely worth a look.)

When *The New York Times's* Dan Barry told the story of the occult hand in a nostalgic piece last summer, I called Janega to discuss the hand. He said he first heard about it in 1999 from another journalist. In 2004, he decided that it was time to give

the game away after finding a few too many articles with less-than-subtle mentions of the occult hand, each sticking out like a sore occult thumb.

One of the people Janega interviewed for his article was Paul Greenberg, the editorial-page editor of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* and a frequent occult hander. In 2006, Greenberg wrote a column about how he and a few colleagues, loath to let the Order die, came up with a new phrase. At the time, Greenberg wrote, the new Order—of which he is the self-appointed "Supreme Poobah, Benevolent Dictator, or Exalted Whatever"—had 11 confirmed members.

Janega was pleased to hear that his article hadn't destroyed the Order, and that a "new phoenix" had risen from the occult hand's ashes to "fly through the Internet." So long as it isn't easily Googleable, he thinks, the secret should remain wrapped in mystery for another four decades. What is it? I'll never tell.

In the meantime, the occult hand appears to be alive (or undead?) and well. It has waved at *Chicago Tribune* readers at least once since Janega's 2004 report. An April 2011 dispatch about an odd photo of President and Mrs. Obama on the steps of Air Force One, noted: "It was as if an Occult Hand had appeared between the first couple." The article was written by...James Janega.

—Sara Morrison

Language Corner There, there

There are many ways to start articles and sentences. There is often a way to avoid beginning with the phrases that begin these two sentences. It can save words, but—more important—it can get readers into the meat of the matter more quickly.

“There are hundreds of apps aimed specifically at babies” can easily be “Hundreds of apps are aimed specifically at babies.” “There is a report that says as much” could be “A report says as much.” Saving words saves readers’ time, too.

There are times when you want to begin with “There is/are,” such as this sentence,

which seeks to emphasize the existence, rather than what exists, in this case “times.”

“There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy” would be much duller as “More things exist in Heaven and Earth, Horatio...,” even though it might help the iambic pentameter.

There are other times, however, when you are better off saying, “Other times, however, you are better off saying...”

Every time you find yourself writing “there is” or “there are,” think about whether you could get along without a “there” there. It might better help get your point across.

—Merrill Perlman



Sea span Nuru photog Kirk Mastin caught a wave in Chennai, India.

Gifted ’Tis the season

If you love a journalist, you know how hard it is to find the perfect gift—they’re so neurotic! So idealistic! Never fear. The following quick-and-dirty holiday gift guide has you covered.

- The Nuru Project (nuruproject.org) offers gift certificates for work by photojournalists (above), and donates part of the proceeds to charity.

- “Trust me! I’m a journalist” T-shirt, \$27 from Café Press (cafeappress.com)

- Sign up your ink-stained

wretch as a volunteer for The News Literacy Project (thenewsliteracyproject.org), which is teaching kids to be savvy news consumers.

- Get him/her a pre-paid phone card for the Feel Better Network (feelbetternetwork.com), a self-esteem hotline where they can chat live with psychologists and life coaches.
- Make a donation in your journo’s name to the Afghan Women’s Writing Project (awwproject.org).

And if you still can’t decide what to get, may we suggest a gift subscription to CJR?

Happy holidays!

Hard Numbers

54

Percent of Americans who knew that General Motors’ decision to close its plant in Janesville, WI, happened before Barack Obama was president, not on his watch, as Romney supporters have charged

25

Percent who knew the claim by Obama supporters that Mitt Romney asked the government for a taxpayer-funded bailout for one of Bain Capital’s companies while he worked at Bain, is false

49

Percent who knew that Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels’s statement, in response to Obama’s convention speech, that half of all adults under 30 are currently unemployed, is false

25

Percent who knew that more jobs were created in Obama’s first term than in George W. Bush’s last term

16

Percent who answered “Muslim” when asked what Obama’s religion is. He is a Christian.

67

Percent who knew that Romney is Mormon

46 million

Number of people living in poverty in the United States

0.2

Percent of campaign coverage in major news outlets that dealt substantively with poverty during the first six months of 2012

0

Number of substantive campaign stories on poverty aired or published in that period by ABC World News, NBC Nightly News, NPR’s *All Things Considered*, and Newsweek

18

Percent of campaign stories during that period that dealt with the national debt

7.2

Highest unemployment rate when a sitting president has been re-elected since World War II. Unemployment is currently 7.8 percent.

Sources: Annenberg Public Policy Center, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Bureau of Labor Statistics, FAIR



Open Bar The Anchor Bar

Detroit, MI

Year opened 1959. It's been in its current location since 1993, after its purchase by the Derderian family.

Who drinks here Union members, hockey fans, post-shift cops, and newspaper and TV journalists.

Signature drink "The coldest beer anywhere," says owner Vaughn Derderian (\$3 bottles).

Oops In 1970, when the FBI investigated alleged gambling at the Anchor, then located elsewhere, *Detroit News* Publisher Peter Clark let the agency monitor the bar from an abutting vacant office. Nearly simultaneous with arrests at the Anchor on May 6, 1971, the *News* appeared with the front-page headline: "16 Detroit Policemen Accused as FBI Raids Big Betting Ring." No

other outlet had the story, suggesting the paper and the feds struck a deal.

Solidarity The Derderians didn't hold a grudge, and the bar was both refuge and staging area during the 19-month newspaper strike that began in July 1995. The strikers would gather there each day before marching, and they published a newspaper, the *Sunday Journal*, in office space above the bar. The Newspaper Guild representing *News* and *Detroit Free Press* employees still has meetings here.

—Tanveer Ali

Send recommendations for this feature to openbar@cjr.org.

Death becomes... who?

What the *NY Times* obits say about America

The New York Times is, more than any other single publication, the nation's arbiter of erudition, prosperity, and success. So what better tool to gauge our collective sense of who and what matters, and how that has changed through the years, than to analyze the newspaper's obit section? What does it take to merit an obit in the *Times*?

Earlier this year, I deployed 24 undergraduate students from the University of Michigan, where I was teaching as a visiting professor, to try to answer this question. The students scoured every obit published during the month of February, from 1942 through 2012, for the following information: place of death; birthplace; where s/he lived; gender; marital status; occupation; college attended; professional achievements; family lineage; parents' occupations/achievements; spouse's/children's occupations/achievements; survivors; military service; association memberships; and sexual orientation. We also noted, if apparent, the deceased's race and religion.

Our project was by no means scientific, but the results were nonetheless revealing:

- In the 1940s and '50s, the paper ran many more obits than it does today; some were but a single paragraph.
- Prior to 1960, cause of death was not always included; today, it usually is. In our survey, AIDS was first listed as a cause of death in 1992.
- Where the dead were educated has remained relatively constant: The Ivy League reigns supreme.
- The obits have always been male-heavy. In 1972, a typical female obit was two paragraphs, and spoke not of the deceased's accomplishments but of those of her husband and sons.
- Starting in the 1990s, the obits became more diverse, racially and ethnically, but also in terms of people who had distinguished

themselves in occupations other than business or politics—attorneys, artists, scientists, athletes, and actors.

But how does the *Times* decide whose contributions to society are worth noting? A colleague and friend of mine, Hanno Hardt, died October 11, 2011. Hardt was an internationally known scholar of communication, the author of nine influential books and scores of articles. Hardt coined the word "newsworker," preferring it to "journalist," since he fervently believed that reporters in their essence were not so different from fabric workers who are paid by the piece. Any communications scholar in the world likely has heard of Hardt. There also was enough color about Hardt to make for a classic *Times* obit. He called himself a neo-Marxist and drove a snazzy red BMW convertible; he bore such an uncanny physical resemblance to the writer Kurt Vonnegut that the two were occasionally confused.

However, Hardt was a professor at the University of Iowa—not the Ivy League. Still, I thought, it was worth a try. The day Hardt died, I contacted the *Times* with a brief note of his significance. After several days, I heard nothing back. I sent another email, and again got nothing. Hardt hadn't made the cut.

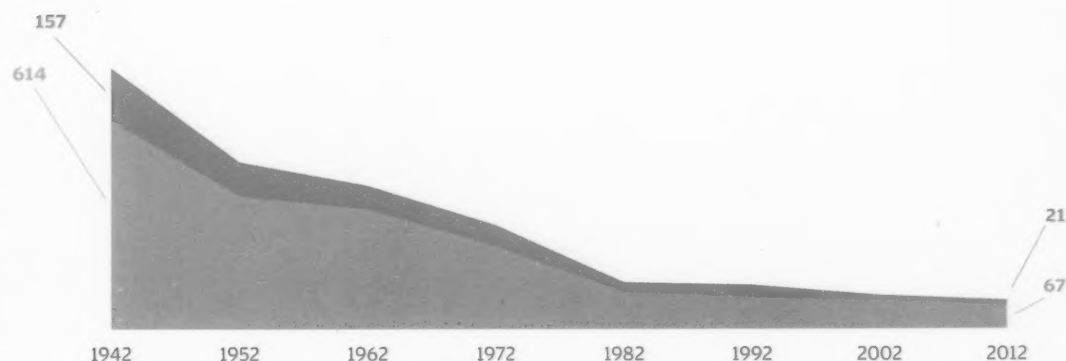
What if Hardt had taught at Columbia or Harvard? What if he'd been married to a Hungarian countess or Lauren Hutton? Might that have changed the calculus? That's the ineffable quality of obits. Like much of the news, obits are a black box when it comes to who gets in and who doesn't. There are luminaries who must get in. The other 40 percent are up for grabs.

The nature of news, of course, is that "all the news that's fit to print" changes every day. Some days there is certainly more news that's fit than others—and the newshole seldom changes to accommodate this ebb and flow. A front-page story one day gets shoved inside another day, and the same principle applies to obits. Spare a thought for Aldous Huxley, who had the misfortune to die on November 22, 1963—and thus was overshadowed by a much larger JFK obit the next day.

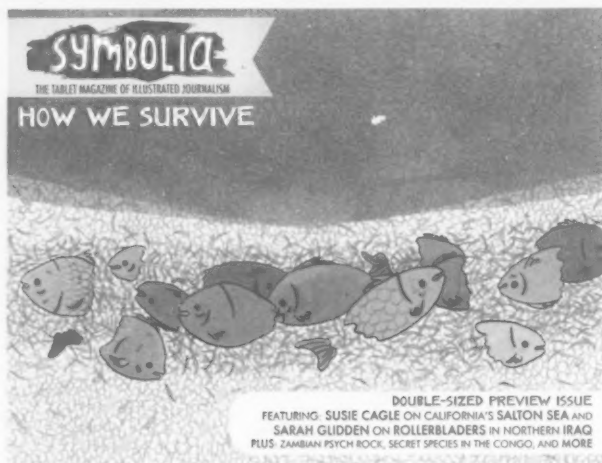
—Stephen G. Bloom

■ Female ■ Male

Obit numbers for each year are from the month of February.



Dead reckoning Over the last 70 years, *The New York Times* has published fewer obituaries. The ones that do get in have become longer and generally more diverse vis-à-vis race, ethnicity, occupation, and sexual orientation. The gender gap, though, has persisted.



Behind the News Give me a visual

Serious graphic novels, like *Maus* or *Persepolis*, have proven that comics aren't always funny. But what about graphic journalism? This fall, *Symbolia*, a bimonthly publication that blends reporting with illustrations, will launch on the iPad. *Symbolia* defines graphic journalism broadly: The first issue, entitled "How We Survive," includes several hand-drawn comics, infographics, and animation. *Symbolia* has a multisensory aspect, too, with music clips and snippets from interviews

accompanying several of the longer pieces.

"How We Survive" includes a long comic about environmental devastation in California's Salton Sea, a dispatch from Iraqi Kurdistan, a profile of a Chinese microbiologist, and a relatively text-heavy piece about a psychedelic rock band in Zambia. Some of the contributors are graphic journalists, like Susie Cagle, who gained a following for her spot illustrations documenting Occupy Oakland. Other pieces required a reporter and an artist to collaborate. Everything in *Symbolia* is factchecked.

Symbolia's founding editor and publisher, Erin Polgreen, is the former managing director of the Media Consortium and a comics lover. "When I was 13 or 14, I used to keep quarters in a pinch jar to buy comics with," Polgreen recalls. She was able to start *Symbolia* through grants

from the McCormick Foundation New Media Women Entrepreneurs initiative and the International Women's Media Foundation. (She did not submit either application in comic form.) Polgreen has said that at least 50 percent of contributors for each issue will be women. "The lack of women is an ongoing issue in both the journo and comics worlds, and this is a way to address it," says Polgreen, who also runs a Tumblr called *Graphic Ladies!?*, a showcase of women's work.

"How We Survive" will be available for free. After the launch issue, *Symbolia* will cost \$11.99 for a year's subscription and \$2.99 per issue. Polgreen hopes, in time, to turn *Symbolia* into a monthly publication accessible on all tablet devices. "Starting as a bimonthly will give us time to respond to feedback," she says.

—Jessica Weisberg

ILLUSTRATION BY SUSIE CAGLE, DESIGN BY JOYCE RICE

Title Search Python developer

Alexandre Conrad is a Python developer for SurveyMonkey. **Jay Woodruff** interviewed him in September.

Have you ever been slapped in a bar after sharing your job title? I wish!

What's the weirdest reaction you've gotten? I think from myself. When I moved from Paris to the Bay Area and realized that being a Python developer was no longer rare.

How does France compare with the Bay Area in terms of the technology scene? When it comes to technology, I think France is still better at making cheese. Seriously, France has a lot of smart people but the high-tech industry is nowhere close to Silicon Valley. France's economy makes it difficult to become an entrepreneur.

And the wine? I will stick with French wine, thank you.

Give us your Tweetable definition of a Python developer. A nerd who turns beautiful lines of code into software.

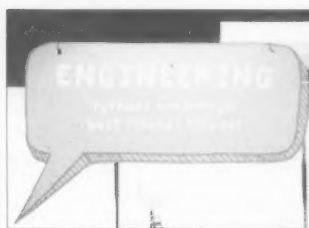
How'd you get into this racket? I am not sure. I did spend long



hours on the Internet as a kid in the early '90s, thinking this thing was better than Minitel. My parents confiscated my computer for months due to my bad grades at school. At 16, I worked in a video-game store, and then was a graphic designer for yogurt packages. I ended up as a software engineer

when I wrote my prior company's back-office software 10 years ago.

What do you tell relatives you do for a living? That I am a Python programmer and that they should try it out, too! My wife is a lawyer, but she just started taking some Java classes "for fun." Maybe to understand me better.



So, seriously: How exactly do you keep the snakes from eating the monkeys? We put up signs in the office.

FIONA CONRAD

A Matter Of Time Pretty in Finke

In October, auto-racing and truck-leasing scion Jay Penske announced that he'd bought *Variety*, the storied Hollywood trade publication founded in 1907. Penske was quick to note that the brand would remain distinct from his other media holdings, which include *HollywoodLife.com*, edited by Bonnie Fuller, and *Deadline.com*, the domain of Nikki Finke. But would it be so terrible if a little Finke fierceness rubbed off on her new corporate sibling? Imagine:

TOLDJA! Mediocre Silverman Laffer On Spring Sked

HOT RED BAND TRAILER Zac Efron Tentpole Preem

R.I.P. Low-Level Studio Exec You've Never Heard of

EXCLUSIVE A Press Release

Advisory I'm Sick This Week



Darts & Laurels Women's work

When *The New York Times* made *Buffalo News* editor Margaret Sullivan its new public editor in September, there seemed to be a general consensus that she couldn't do much worse than outgoing Arthur Brisbane, lover of truth vigilantism and hater of the Internet. So far, she's done everything she promised. Along with the bimonthly print column, she updates the public editor blog almost daily and keeps her Twitter feed fresh, with entertaining retweets, links to interesting articles, and

replies to her readers. Whereas her predecessor told Poynter that social media was an "alien realm" for him and didn't see his role as part of a "conversation," Sullivan has embraced both—which seems a necessary part of the job these days, especially at a publication like the *Times* that is on the cutting edge of Internet journalism. A **Laurel** to her for her job so far.

Sometimes, sitting here at my desk, I wonder: Is this my life's calling? Why am I typing and earning a paycheck when I could be bearing children, my true—and only—role in society? Fortunately, at times like these, there are men like Tim Dewar out there to remind me that the fairer sex is capable of more.

The *Ojai Valley News* publisher recently wrote an editorial for the paper's annual "Women of the Ojai Valley" supplement titled "Womens' [sic] contributions go way beyond childbearing." Thanks, Mr. Dewar! Here is a **Dart** pie I made while barefoot in the kitchen.

—Sara Morrison

The Lower Case

JONAS BROTHERS

Siblings remain committed to helping children overcome diversity

Daily Variety, 9/14/12

Research finds club improves children

Ventura County (CA) Star, 8/23/12

Smoking warning labels will help save lives

Philadelphia Inquirer, 8/29/12

CJR offers a one-year subscription or gift subscription for an item published in *The Lower Case*. Please send original clippings to CJR, Journalism Building, 2950 Broadway, Columbia Univ., NY, NY 10027, or links for Web items to tso2@columbia.edu. Please include address, phone, and email.

How-To DIY celebrity profile

“It is half-past 10 on another soullessly sun-kissed Los Angeles morning. And _____ is late. I’ve been promising young star _____ sitting for an hour in _____ boho-chic diner/farmers’ market/trendy hotel lobby worrying that maybe I had gotten the time or place wrong, when suddenly _____ bursts in, all apologies and assuring me _____ is normally never late. _____ orders _____ meaningless, nonrevelatory menu item and spends the next five minutes explaining how _____ would have been on time if _____ who usually _____ his/her pet/spouse/agent/publicist wakes _____ up reliably at 8 a.m., somehow failed to. “I’m going to kill him,” _____ whines. Immediately, I forgive _____ him/her. It is just the kind of easy seduction _____ manages in _____ movies. I look around and note that all those observing are utterly smitten...”

Going to great lengths

After two years as the hot new thing,
the e-singles market is getting serious—and crowded

BY MICHAEL MEYER

From the beginning, The Atavist was a small startup with a lot of big playmates. A pioneer in the e-singles space, the Brooklyn-based company became an instant media darling, and when Amazon launched Kindle Singles in January 2011—widely considered the moment when e-singles emerged as a salable product—The Atavist was behind two of its most-celebrated inaugural titles.

A little more than a year later, The Atavist added Google executive chairman Eric E. Schmidt and Netscape founder Marc Andreessen as investors. And in September, The Atavist announced that it would enter into a strategic partnership with Brightline, a new publishing house created by entertainment moguls Scott Rudin and Barry Diller (who pulled the plug on *Newsweek's* print magazine in October).

All this activity from a company that publishes one extralong magazine article a month. (Disclosure: CJR contributing editor Alissa Quart is editor at large for The Atavist.)

Two years ago, when Amazon, The Atavist, and fellow e-singles startup Byliner were being heralded as saviors of narrative journalism, it was unclear exactly how that salvation would be accomplished. The business model (to say nothing of the category itself) was unproven. Curators such as Longreads.com and Longform.org—with the help of read-it-later apps like Instapaper—had already established that an appetite existed for longer articles on the Web, but no one was sure that people would pay for them. Was it really possible that single-copy sales of extralong works of journalism could be a way of supporting such expensive, labor-intensive work for the long haul?

On the eve of the e-single's second birthday, we are finally getting some answers. With a bit of the hype burned away, and some impressive sales numbers racked up (Elizabeth Kaye's "Lifeboat No. 8" was the first e-single to hit No. 1 on *The New York Times's* ebook best-seller list, beating out full-length books), the e-single is beginning to settle into its place

in the market—or, rather, in multiple markets. Both Apple and Barnes & Noble now have their own e-singles stores to feed their respective e-readers. Big publishers like Penguin, which has been doing some form of short digital content since summer 2008, are beginning to learn how to use e-singles to augment their overall sales. And, encouraged by the success of the pioneers, a second wave of players—including a soon-to-launch digital magazine called Matter, which will publish one "unmissable" longform story a week—are getting into the game.

The Atavist and Byliner, meanwhile, are maturing as businesses. And both are moving in more or less the same direction: partnering with larger publishers, implementing subscription services, and launching Web apps that allow readers to bypass the middlemen, such as Apple or Amazon, and purchase and read singles on the device of their choosing. In other words, the saviors of longform are figuring out how to fit their stories into a larger business model—as magazines and newspapers before them found a way to package journalism with advertising.

"We're combining aspects of the magazine and book model," says The Atavist's CEO and cofounder Evan Ratliff. "It's a matter of finding how those pieces fit together." That means The Atavist crew can cobble together revenue ideas from either industry, but at the same time they're constrained by existing consumer expectations for both industries.

The Atavist got deep into the nuances of these expectations as it readied the launch of its subscription program this fall. Ratliff and his colleagues figured out how to measure readership and apportion subscription revenue to authors without much trouble, but then there was the matter of the back catalog. Atavist titles (like books) are sold individually, and offering subscribers free access to an archive of content they might otherwise pay for posed considerable risk. When I spoke to Ratliff in late September, he had yet to make a final decision on the back-catalog issue, the length of the subscription, or

the price, even as he was hoping to launch the program just a few weeks later.

The partnership with Brightline gives The Atavist the opportunity to try full-length books, but in the short term, at least, Ratliff says his plans are to “be better at what we’ve already been doing.” That includes analyzing a large trove of anonymized data on how readers find, purchase, and read Atavist titles. “We’re not going to be rating the authors and saying they have to get a certain amount of traffic or something like that,” Ratliff says. “It’s just that now we know what business we’re in on the publishing side, and it’s time to figure out how we optimize it in some way.”

While The Atavist is indeed a new kind of publisher, it currently earns less than half of its revenue from publishing.

ancillary revenue streams, but Byliner CEO John Tayman doesn’t see it that way. “Do you need a secondary revenue stream to make a business out of selling stories to readers?” Tayman asks. “No, you do not.”

Both Tayman and Ratliff insist that their decisions to sell their titles directly through Web apps is less about circumventing the 30 percent cut that Apple or Amazon takes of a sale, and more about getting their stories in front of readers as seamlessly as possible—whether those readers want those stories on their desktop, iPad, Kindle, or whatever. Selling directly to consumers is about decreasing the “friction,” as Tayman puts it—the obstacles between a reader and the book he or she wants to read.

Tayman sees Byliner’s forthcoming subscription program as “a logical extension of what we’re currently doing,” thanks to its ability to attract repeat business. “A tremendously high percentage of readers who purchase one Byliner Original go on to purchase multiple titles from us,” Tayman says. “Subscriptions will simply make reading for such people that much more convenient.”

For a large legacy publishing house like Penguin, e-singles are indeed a revenue consideration in their own right—it has published more than 100 “Penguin Specials” thus far, and sold more than half a million copies.

Molly Barton, Penguin’s global digital director, also sees an opportunity for short content to boost the sales of full-length books. “We’ve seen over and over with digital publishing generally that having multiple titles out in the market is helpful,”

she says. It turns out that e-singles can be a kind of gateway drug to full-length titles, as well as a way to keep the attention of an author’s fan base between longer works. Barton predicts that for Penguin, at least, “short content will become more tightly coupled with the overall publishing program for an author,” playing an increasing role in how their work is marketed.

E-singles came into being in part because of the dwindling availability of longform work in magazines, newspapers, and online; the success of The Atavist, Byliner, and their ilk in the past two years has shown that there is an enthusiastic audience for the form. And now even Web-news upstart BuzzFeed is jumping in, announcing in October that it is hiring a longform editor.

So even as the evolutionary arc of the e-single is becoming a bit clearer, those on the inside say the market is still in a see-what-sticks phase. As Mark Bryant, Byliner’s cofounder and editor in chief, put it, “We’re all sort of figuring it out as we go along. It makes it challenging, but also quite fun.” **CJR**

MICHAEL MEYER is a CJR staff writer, and edits the Guide to Online News Startups database at CJR.org.



Longevity? Atavist’s Evan Ratliff, left, and Byliner’s Mark Bryant, pioneers of the e-singles genre, are trying to fit their stories into a larger business model.

The majority comes from licensing its software platform to clients such as TED Books, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Paris Review*. It’s this platform that is The Atavist’s strength in the marketplace; it’s also a non-journalistic revenue stream that helps support the company’s core journalistic mission. In that way, The Atavist more closely resembles a Web news startup than it does a traditional publisher.

That business model also insulates The Atavist from what is arguably the most challenging aspect of the e-singles space: the low price point. E-singles typically sell for between \$1.99 and \$3.99, and you don’t have to be an accountant to realize it would take a lot of sales at that price to sustain even a modest business. “We don’t want the entire future of our business to rest on selling a million copies of something that costs \$2,” Ratliff says.

Byliner, meanwhile, is meeting that challenge head-on. An announcement about a big publishing partnership is due any day, and the company claims that it will sell “a million” copies of its Byliner Originals this year alone. While it originally published only nonfiction, Byliner has since expanded into both fiction and serials. From a journalistic perspective, one could almost think of these as Byliner’s version of

Apply to be a Shorenstein Center Fellow

The SHORENSTEIN CENTER FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM offers an opportunity for outstanding journalists and scholars to spend a semester at Harvard University. The mission of the fellowship program is to advance research in the field of media, politics and public policy; provide an opportunity for reflection; facilitate a dialogue among scholars, journalists and policymakers; and create a vibrant and long-lasting community.

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A screenshot of the Columbia Journalism Review website. The header shows the date "Wednesday, October 17, 2012" and the URL "cjr.org". The main title is "COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW" with the tagline "The future of media is here". Below the title is a navigation bar with links: "The Industry", "Politics & Policy", "Business", "Science", "Culture", "Magazine", "Resources", and "Search". The main content area features several articles. One article is titled "BEHIND THE NEWS Music Journalism has exploded" with a photo of a person. Another article is titled "THE AUDIT A request for Andrew Schrank" with a photo of a man. There are also smaller articles like "SWING STATES PROJECT When factchecking goes 'gray'" and "THE KICKER Flushing for attention". On the right side, there is a "Journo Tweets" section with tweets from @thedailybeast and @buzzfeed. At the bottom right, there is a "Help sustain serious Give to CJR's Fund for Journalist Future" section with a "Click here to Donate" button. The bottom of the page has a "MOST POPULAR" section.

The Fame Game



Good hair decade Actress Christie Brinkley and Army Archerd, longtime columnist for *Daily Variety*, greet fans on the red carpet at the 1984 Academy Awards. Arrivals coverage was first televised in 1976 (co-hosted by Regis Philbin!); the full live pre-show debuted in 1999.

Just in time for Hollywood awards season, CJR shines a Klieg light on entertainment journalism—a sometimes deprecated but highly influential corner of the craft.

In the past half century, as the big movie studios ceded control of the media narrative, celebrities have loomed ever larger on the cultural landscape, both here and abroad, and have come to sustain a vast economy that orbits around them—agents, lawyers, managers, spin artists, makeup artists, masseurs, etc. Advertisers dangle endorsement checks bearing many zeroes; candidates and charities vie for a sliver of reflected glory. And media properties are right in there pitching, trying to ensure a good newsstand sale, high ratings—their own share of that ineffable magic. Here's a look behind at least *some* of the scenes.

Questionable taste Fearless as ever, Ricky Gervais talks about what it's like to be on the receiving end of media queries. **Page 20**

Celeb-O-Matic Yes, it's your handy map of access to the stars! **Page 22**

In cold type When Truman Capote laid bare Marlon Brando in a groundbreaking 1957 *New Yorker* profile, "The Duke in His Domain," he knew exactly what he was doing. Douglas McCollam reports. **Page 24**

The red-carpet treatment Take a stroll down Movieland's Memory Lane to the pre-Oscar ritual of a simpler time. **Page 30**

The rules of the game Longtime movie publicist Reid Rosefelt explains how celebrity access works, from the inside. **Page 32**

Gross misunderstanding Showbiz economics expert Edward Jay Epstein decodes the hype around box-office grosses. **Page 35**

Avoiding pilot error Want to know what new TV shows will do well? Keep an eye on TVGuide.com's Watchlist. **Page 37**

Esprit de corpse Jay A. Fernandez recalls the long-gone days when reporters could spend extended periods on movie sets. **Page 38**

Taking the seen-it route Having done it herself, Sara Morrison tells how to break into journalism by recapping TV shows. **Page 41**

Questionable taste

Ricky Gervais describes the pleasures and pitfalls of being interviewed

AS HIS GOLDEN GLOBES HOSTING GIGS HAVE SHOWN, **RICKY Gervais** is not afraid to say what he thinks. So who better to consult about the odd tribal rite that is the Hollywood publicity junket? These highly efficient PR marathons, in which dozens of journalists rotate through the same nondescript set for a few precious minutes with the star, are the reason you see, hear, and read more or less the same soundbites over and over the week a new film or TV show debuts. Gervais is currently promoting his new app (Just Sayin'), several TV series, and his latest comedy shows, as well as Learn English with Ricky Gervais, "the YouTube translation project," which invites viewers to provide subtitles in other languages and then repost them to YouTube (et voilà, "A New Landmark in Human Comprehension"!). So Gervais knows what it's like to be on the receiving end of press queries. **CJR's Cyndi Stivers** sent along questions by email.

What is the largest number of interviews you've done in a single day? Probably about 40 five-minute interviews for a film. It doesn't sound like hard work, sitting in a chair and talking about yourself all day, but it is quite mentally exhausting. And nowadays, it's harder than ever before, because even though you get asked the same questions over and over again, you want to give slightly different answers, because now people have access to everything you do. You don't want the same anecdote popping up on every website, chat show, and entertainment news channel. Still, mustn't grumble.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being utter disgust and 10 being profound respect, where would you peg your attitude toward the entertainment media? It's an industry. And like any other industry, there are good and bad people, ethical and unethical practices, truth and lies. It's what you make it, and you choose what crowd you roll with. I've been lucky, in the sense that I own my own labor. I'm not really beholden to anyone, so my decisions have been based on what was fun to do. I've never done a job for a million pounds that I wouldn't have done for free. I didn't give the money back,

though, obviously. That would be crazy. Haha. It's as good as any other business, I guess, and probably more fun.

Other than this one, what is the most idiotic question you've ever gotten from a reporter? Once I did a light-hearted Q&A, and the journalist asked me three things I'd save from my house in a fire. I said, "Oh, my cat... My salamander... Three, you say? ... Uhm... Probably one of the twins."

Now, I thought this was an obvious joke, but the article came out with no hint of irony. Later that week, I did another interview, and the journalist asked me what my twins' names were. I pointed out that I didn't have any twins, and if I did, I'd almost certainly save them both before the salamander.

What was the most thought-provoking question? This one. I'm thinking hard but have no answer.

Is it easier to promote things that are all yours, like *Just Sayin*, or projects on which you're an actor for hire? That's a no-brainer. Things that I have created and written and directed are 10 times easier to promote. This is, luckily, most things I've done.

I always feel slightly sorry for an actor who has to toe the party line for a film that is already getting panned, and he still has another 200 interviews to do. Then I remember it's still better than having to do real work.

What aspect of dealing with the media, if any, is fun for you? I like US chat shows. They're always fun for me and never seem plug-heavy. I treat them more like a piece of work. Letterman, Conan, Jimmy Fallon, Jon Stewart—all comedy-savvy, who also get the message across.

I like owning a little bit of the media. Podcasting, blogging, Twitter and now *Just Sayin*. The most important thing for me has always been artistic freedom. Some people say I'm a control freak. I can never argue with them. Art is no place for democracy. One of my favorite sayings is, "A camel is a



The frankness that refreshes Before the Golden Globes in January, Gervais told *Entertainment Weekly*, 'Offense is taken, not given.'

horse designed by committee." I told Karl [Pilkington, his hapless sad-sack sidekick and frequent comic foil] this and he said, "I'd ask the committee which one of them came up with the hump." Haha.

Please rank (from least to most favorite) the clichés journalists use to describe you. "Mean"; "Shocking"; "Controversial"; "Atheist"; "Hilarious."

What is the one question you've always wanted to answer but no journalist has ever asked? "Why did you go crazy with an Uzi in China and take out 300 people who skin dogs alive or torture bears and tigers for fake medicine?"

I'd like to be asked that one day, but don't deserve the honor yet.

What activities do you prefer to being interviewed? Sitting in my pajamas, drinking beer, watching TV with my girlfriend and my cat. Mind you, I'd probably rather be doing that than anything.

I don't mind being interviewed at all, to be honest. As long as it's about the work. I don't like answering questions about other people's work or lives. It's nothing to do with me, and I don't like adding to that particular debate. If the journalist is respectful—without prejudice—I am the same. It's when they either come with an agenda or without any knowledge

of my work where it gets a little awkward. It's also a necessary part of the job. At least a *bit* of it now and again, anyway. As an artist, you want to get final edit; then, lots of people to see your work. They have to know it's available, basically.

What is your favorite movie genre? I love revenge movies. Justified violence is exhilarating. And tales of honor. My least favorite is probably gritty British gangster films, twee middle-class dramas about some posh twat who has writer's block until he meets a younger woman who understands him more than his wife, and awful knockabout sex comedies aimed at 14-year-old boys and lonely middle-aged men.

Who would you like to give a Pulitzer Prize, and for what? Christopher Hitchens, for nearly everything he ever wrote.

Since you don't believe in an afterlife, which journalist would you like to not come back as? I'm struggling to think of the name of a journalist who I would care enough about to not want to be.

What adjectives do you most deplore? Insipid ones. Although "insipid" itself is a good one.

"Holy" is annoyingly meaningless. But "holey" is okay.

What is your favorite adverb? Yumbunctiously. **CJR**





In cold type

When Truman Capote set out to profile Marlon Brando for *The New Yorker* in 1957, he knew just how to set his traps

BY DOUGLAS MCCOLLAM

One morning in January, 1957, Josh Logan, the veteran Broadway producer and Hollywood director, came down from his room into the lobby of the Miyako Hotel in Kyoto, Japan, and spied just about the last person in the world he wanted to see. There, at the front desk, perched on his tippy-toes to sign in, was the diminutive writer and *enfant terrible*, Truman Capote.

Logan was not entirely shocked to see him. Weeks earlier, he had been informed of Capote's intention to write a story for *The New Yorker* about the making of *Sayonara*, the film the director was shooting in Japan for Warner Bros., starring Marlon Brando. Logan had moved aggressively to head off the story. The previous year, Capote had written his inaugural feature for the magazine, about a touring company of the musical *Porgy and Bess* as it made a landmark journey through the Soviet Union. Capote spent weeks on the road with the players, and the resulting two-part story, "The Muses Are Heard," was an unsparing and often hilarious vivisection of the troupe and its well-to-do sponsors.

Logan had no intention of subjecting his own cast and crew to the same withering scrutiny. In particular, he was concerned about what might happen if Capote gained access to his mercurial leading man. Though Brando was notoriously press-shy, and Logan doubted Capote's ability to crack the star's enigmatic exterior, he wasn't taking any chances. He and William Goetz, *Sayonara*'s producer, had both written to *The New Yorker* stating that they would not cooperate for the piece and, furthermore, that if Capote did journey to Japan he would be barred from the set. Nevertheless, Capote had come.

As Logan later recounted, his reaction to Capote's sudden appearance was visceral. He came up behind Capote, and without saying a word, picked the writer up and transported him across the lobby, depositing him outside the front door of the hotel. "Now come on, Josh!" Capote cried. "I'm not going to write anything bad."

Logan went immediately upstairs to Brando's room to

deliver a warning: "Don't let yourself be left alone with Truman. He's after you." His warning would go unheeded. Recalling his reaction to Capote, Logan later wrote, "I had a sickening feeling that what little Truman wanted, little Truman would get."

His fears proved well-founded. Two nights after arriving in Japan, Capote showed up at Brando's door wearing a tan cardigan and carrying a bottle of vodka for what in Brando's estimation was to be a quick dinner and an early night (indeed, Brando instructed his assistant to call in an hour so he'd have an excuse to get rid of Capote). Instead, when Capote left Brando's room six hours later, he was convinced that he had the raw material for a groundbreaking profile of the reclusive star.

What transpired between Brando and Capote over the course of their hours alone together in that hotel room has long been a subject of historical curiosity. Just how did Capote get the taciturn Brando to talk? Was Brando (as he later claimed) tricked by the devious Capote? Or was the star a willing participant in the unmaking of his own image? Was there (as Capote dubiously claimed) some sort of sexual history between the two? What is clear is that more than a half-century after it appeared, "The Duke in His Domain" remains the yardstick by which celebrity profiles are measured—an early harbinger of the New Journalism that would come into full flower in the 1960s. With its profusion of intimate details, confessional tone, and novelistic observation of Brando's character, the story marked a clear evolution of celebrity journalism and heralded the arrival of the invasive, full-immersion pop culture of today.

In part, the curiosity about the intersection of these two 20th-century cultural icons is due to the great differences between them. By 1957 Brando, through his portrayals of characters like Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Terry Malloy in *On The Waterfront*, and Johnny Strabler in *The Wild One*, was a living archetype of postwar American



Capote, 1955 On the rise and learning to be 'a human tape recorder.'

machismo, a monosyllabic tough guy and acting genius with the sculpted build of a prizefighter. In contrast, Capote—with his babykins voice, theatrical swish, and elfin stature (around 5'3")—occupied the opposite end of the male spectrum, looking, as one writer put it, about "as dangerous as a chipmunk."

But for all their apparent dissimilarities, aspects of their lives were remarkably similar. Both were the lone sons of alcoholic mothers and distant, troubled fathers. Both had been shipped off to military schools in their teens, which they had despised, and neither went to college. Both were known by friends and acquaintances for their skill in manipulating the lives of those around them.

And both were transformative figures in their respective artistic fields. "I've interviewed thousands of people," Lawrence Grobel, a writer who spent many hours talking with both Brando and Capote, told me. "And just a few give off a real sense of power in person. Both of these guys were like that." Still, if anyone was placing a bet on who would come out *on top* in a conflict between these two, all the money would have gone on Brando (with Brando probably placing the biggest bet of all).

But in the months following their encounter, it was Brando

who grew increasingly desperate to stop publication of Capote's story. By turns furious, distraught, threatening, and pleading, he tried in vain to get the story killed. "My soul is a private place," Brando liked to say. But Capote would lay it bare. Gone was the dangerous mystique that fueled the early years of Brando's stardom; in its place, a portrait of a deluded and confused man-child, overcome by his fame and haunted by the ghost of his alcoholic mother. "I'll kill him!" Brando told Logan when *The New Yorker* profile came out. "It's too late," Logan shot back. "You should have killed him before you invited him to dinner."

THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN BRANDO AND Capote came at a key juncture in both men's careers. Born six months apart in 1924, they were both 32 when they met in Japan, each already burnished by a decade of fame. Both had made their names while still in their early twenties in the pulsing firmament of postwar Manhattan. In their youth, both were notorious for their physical beauty, incandescent talent, and odd mannerisms.

Brando arrived in New York in 1943, after being expelled from his military academy in Minnesota that spring (his list of transgressions was long). His sister was already living in Greenwich Village, studying painting with Hans Hofmann, the noted abstract expressionist. While living with her in the Village, Brando gravitated toward the dramatic workshop run by Erwin Piscator and Stella Adler, who had imported the acting techniques of Russia's Konstantin Stanislavsky. "The Method," in which actors draw on their own memories and experiences to create their character,

would transform American acting and, in Brando, it had found its most potent initiate. Adler soon was predicting great things for the brooding Midwestern teenager, telling one of her young protégés, "Wait 'til you meet this kid.... This is a genius." Though Brando's previous experience in the theater was limited to a few school productions, within a year he was appearing on Broadway. By 23, he had landed the role that would make him a star. Though initially deemed too young and pretty to be convincing as the brutish Kowalski in *Streetcar*, Brando was championed by director Elia Kazan, who sent him to Tennessee Williams's beach house in Cape Cod to audition in person. Brando later recounted he only had read for about 30 seconds when Williams told him he had the part. "Then he loaned me bus fare to get back to New York."

Around the same time that Brando's star was rising on Broadway, Capote's own emergence had begun, a little farther uptown. His family moved from suburban Connecticut, where his mother had married her second husband, Joe Capote, to Manhattan's Upper East Side. Truman, barely 18, quickly became a regular at the city's exclusive nightspots, like the Stork Club and El Morocco. Holding down a part-time job as a copyboy at *The New Yorker*, Capote was certain

that his rise to literary greatness was just on the horizon. His colleagues had no such premonitions. An editor at the magazine recalled that when *The New Yorker's* founder, Harold Ross, first encountered Capote in the hallway, it brought him to a dead stop. "What's that?" he inquired, as Capote passed by looking for all the world, the editor recalled, "like a little ballerina." Brendan Gill, a longtime writer at the magazine, remembered Capote as "an absolutely gorgeous apparition," who fluttered and flitted down the musty corridors with a mane of golden hair and, not infrequently, an opera cape.

Capote was ultimately fired from *The New Yorker*, allegedly for offending the poet Robert Frost, who became enraged when Capote walked out in the middle of a reading. But his literary ambitions were undeterred. By 1946, he'd been accepted at the writer's colony at Yaddo in upstate New York where, working alongside fellow southerners like Carson McCullers and Katherine Anne Porter, he began his debut novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. The following year, *Life* magazine featured Capote prominently in a piece about young postwar writers (the piece also noted Gore Vidal, Capote's soon-to-be lifetime antagonist). When the novel appeared in 1948, it shot onto the best-seller list, driven at least in part by the photo on the back cover, which featured Capote reclining suggestively on a sofa, staring at the viewer with bedroom eyes. Commenting on the young Capote's talent in an interview, Somerset Maugham called him "the hope of modern literature."

Though initially ambivalent about working in Hollywood, Brando eventually succumbed and moved west in 1949 for what he viewed as a brief sabbatical from the stage (in fact, he would never appear on Broadway again). The next five years cemented his status not only as Hollywood's hottest leading man, but as a revolutionary figure in American film. The spread of "Brandolatory" infected a generation of up-and-coming actors, as The Method made traditional screen acting seem wooden and inauthentic. "The whole thing up until then, everything was proper," actor Anthony Quinn said of Brando's portrayal of Stanley Kowalski. "Along comes Brando.... [That performance] turns the whole world around.... Everyone started behaving like Brando." Elia Kazan would call Brando's work in *Waterfront* "the finest thing ever done by an American film actor." The performance garnered Brando his first Oscar as best actor (he'd been nominated earlier for *Streetcar*, but lost to sentimental favorite Humphrey Bogart in *The African Queen*).

One element of Brando's sudden rise to fame, of course, was relentless media attention, and from the start he despised it. He rarely gave interviews and when he did, he revealed little or nothing. At one point he became so enraged by what he considered inappropriate attention to his private life that he hired his own investigators to dig up dirt on Time Inc. He was so reluctant to promote the movies he appeared in that one producer was reduced to bribing him with a new Thunderbird convertible to get him out on the publicity circuit. At the 1955 premiere in Times Square of his eighth movie, the musical *Guys and Dolls*, the frenzied crowd overran barricades and broke the windows of the limo Brando was riding in. A platoon of police officers had to be sent in to extract the rattled

star. That year saw Brando eclipse Jimmy Stewart, Gary Cooper, and John Wayne as Hollywood's top moneymaker.

The mid-'50s were a productive period for Capote as well. His second novel, *The Grass Harp*, had been well received, and he'd made an initial foray into film when director John Huston hired him to punch up the script for his movie *Beat The Devil*. While working on location for the film in Italy, Capote got into an amusing (and revealing) dust-up with the movie's star, Humphrey Bogart, who was killing time

'My soul is a private place,' Brando liked to say. But Capote would lay it bare.

arm wrestling with the crew. Spotting "Caposy" (as Bogie called him) lingering around, Bogart challenged him to a match and Capote beat him flat, twice, winning \$50 in the process. When Bogart grabbed Capote to express his outrage, the writer promptly wrestled the star to the ground until he cried uncle. Huston, who noted Capote was "the only male I'd ever seen attired in a velvet suit," was impressed. "Truman was a little bulldog of a man.... His effeminacy didn't in any way affect his strength or courage."

Back in New York, Capote had become a fixture in Manhattan high society, particularly among the beautiful "swans," such as Babe Paley, Gloria Guinness, and Slim Keith, who adopted Capote as a kind of literary adornment, court jester, and father confessor (several would later claim to be the inspiration for Capote's free-spirited *It Girl*, Holly Golightly). They took Capote along on exotic vacations, into their luxurious homes, and into their confidence—an intimacy many of them would later regret. One of his female confidants, Marella Agnelli, would later recall how Capote observed people, probing for their soft spots. "I found myself telling him things I never dreamed of telling him." Eventually, Agnelli grew wary of the writer's gift for gaining easy confidences. "I thought that only somebody very strange or mad could have a very intimate, kind, warm relationship and at the same time stab," she remembered, recalling that Capote once told her, "Some people kill with their swords and some with words."

By 1955, Capote was interested in expanding his work into a new area: journalism. "I had to get outside my own imagination and learn to exist in the imagination and lives of other people," Capote told an interviewer. "I had become too obsessed with my particular internal images. That was the main reason I turned to journalism." But Capote wasn't interested in simply exploring the genre; he wanted to change it. "What I wanted to do was bring to journalism the technique of fiction, which moves both horizontally and vertically at the same time: horizontally on the narrative side and vertically by entering *inside* its characters."



Brando, 1957 A Hollywood moneymaker who despised media attention.

After whetting his appetite with his initial feature on the company of *Porgy and Bess* in 1956, Capote went looking for other journalistic subjects. As he later recalled in an interview with Andy Warhol, Capote discussed possibilities with *New Yorker* editor William Shawn. "I said, 'You know, I think where people are making a big mistake is that journalism can be one of the highest art forms there is in a certain new genre.' And he says, 'Well, give me an example.' All right. Let's take the very lowest form of journalism that could possibly be: an interview with a movie star. I mean, what could be lower than that?"

IT WAS ONLY A FEW DAYS INTO FILMING IN JAPAN WHEN Josh Logan began to get a bad feeling about his big-budget spectacular. His leading lady, a novice who had never appeared in a feature film, was showing her inexperience, and a local Kabuki theater troupe that the director had counted on performing in the film was balking at the last minute. Worse, his leading man was acting skittish. Brando had vacillated for a long time about whether to take his role in *Sayonara*, and agreed to sign on only after extensive rewrites on the script, including a new ending. His weight, which had begun to fluctuate as he entered his thirties, was up, and he was supposed to be on a strict diet. More to the point, Carlo Fiore, his friend and assistant, later recalled that he had already lost trust in

Logan and was bored with the movie. "From the start," Fiore noted, Brando "believed *Sayonara* was a wide-screen Technicolor travelogue, pumped up with an improbable love story."

Perhaps it was boredom that led Brando, despite Logan's warning, to meet with Capote. Brando would later claim that he had no idea Capote was doing a story about him, a charge Capote dismissed as absurd. Logan speculated that his efforts to prevent the meeting may have backfired. "Since Marlon automatically sides with any underdog, and I mean *any*, Truman made himself the most put-upon of the underprivileged," Logan recalled. Even though Brando hated the press, Logan thought he invited Capote to dinner to thwart the "big, evil boss figures" who were forbidding the meeting. For his part, Brando indicated that he was willing to get together with Capote because he had traveled to Japan with the photographer Cecil Beaton, a mutual friend.

Fiore, who was in the room when Capote arrived about 7 p.m., claimed in his memoir that Brando had actually forgotten about the meeting. The star had spent the afternoon working on a script for *A Burst of Vermilion*, a western he wanted his production company to make. (The draft would come in at 312 pages. The picture was never made.) Brando instructed Fiore to call his room every hour, so he'd have an excuse to cut the meeting short. Fiore recorded his lasting impression of meeting Capote: "He moved into the room with

that odd graceful gait of his, cradling a bottle of vodka in the crook of his arm. I had heard Capote was small, but I was surprised to see how really small he was. He was slim and trim as a boy, and his feet and hands were as tiny as a child's. Although he was 30 years old or more, he had the frank gaze and smooth features of a 12-year-old innocent. I had never heard him speak, and the high-pitched nasality of his voice softly slurring the words gave me the feeling that an amateur ventriloquist was speaking through this smaller-than-life-size but perfectly proportioned doll."

Capote put the vodka on the table and Brando asked the maid to bring a bucket of ice. Then, Fiore recalled, Capote launched into an elaborate story about the conductor Leonard Bernstein: One day, he and Bernstein had spent a long afternoon at the conductor's apartment during which Capote, at Bernstein's urging, had dished lavishly on their mutual acquaintances. Unknown to Capote, Bernstein had hidden a secret microphone in his apartment to record the entire conversation. Not long after, Bernstein hosted a party attended by many of the same people the two had been discussing. At the height of the evening, Bernstein asked for everyone's attention and produced a tape recorder that played back all of Capote's comments about the attendees, in the writer's unmistakable voice. The worst part, Capote told them, was that Bernstein's side of the conversation had been edited out

so that it appeared as if only Capote had been talking. Fiore wasn't sure what to make of the story, but as he excused himself from Brando's room he had a strong sense of foreboding.

Capote wasn't interested in adopting the traditional tools of his new trade. To achieve the intimacy necessary for his work, he eschewed the use of tape recorders or even note-taking. Instead, he would turn himself into a "human tape recorder." Capote claimed to have the auditory version of a photographic memory that, with practice, he was able to hone to a high degree of accuracy. "This is of the greatest importance in the kind of reportage I do, because it is absolutely fatal to ever take a note or use a tape recorder when you interview somebody." This technique, in Capote's estimation, allowed him to "live inside the situation, to become part of the scene I was recording and not cut myself off from them in any way." (It also, Capote's critics would later claim, allowed him to fictionalize key facts in his work.)

As previously agreed, Fiore rang Brando's room an hour later, only to find him "high as a proverbial kite" and in no mood to cut his interview short. Fiore asked if he'd been drinking. "I had a couple of nips, that's all," Brando responded. Fiore advised him to be cool and not say anything he might regret later. "Truman's already gotten his interview. We're just chatting now, *entre nous*," Brando responded. "Call me in an hour." Fiore, like Logan, knew that properly stimulated, Brando's reticence could drop away. "He rarely drank," Fiore recalled, "and sometimes after only a drink or two, his natural distrust of strangers would evaporate, and he would be sentimental, maudlin, and ready to unfold the story of his life, freely trotting out all the skeletons in his closet."

That Brando did. While (the supposedly dieting) Brando feasted on a dinner of soup, steak, French fries, three kinds of vegetables, spaghetti, rolls, cheese, crackers, and apple pie with ice cream on top, he confessed that stardom had made his life a complete mess. He was in analysis, he told Capote, and he felt like he was "just sitting on a pile of candy gathering thick layers of—of crust." He announced plans to fire his secretary and move to a smaller house, without a cook or a maid or his telephone, which he thought was tapped. He expounded on his "seven-minute" attention span, on his inability to love anyone, and his theories on friendship: "Do you know how I make a friend? I circle around and around. I circle. Then, gradually, I come nearer. Then I reach out and touch them—oh so gently. Then I draw back. Wait awhile. Make them wonder. At just the right moment, I move in again. Touch them. Circle. They don't know what's happening. Before they realize it, they're all entangled, involved. I have them."

Until that night, nothing had been deeper in Brando's closet than his relationship with his troubled mother. Dodie Brando, an amateur actress and frustrated housewife, had encouraged Brando's childhood creative interests while his remote father, in Brando's words, was a "card-carrying prick... a frightening, silent, brooding, angry, hard-drinking, rude man, a bully who loved to give orders and issue ultimatums." Both of his parents struggled with alcoholism. Capote's mother, Nina, was also a serious alcoholic, and her abandonment of Capote at a young age, leaving him to live with relatives while she pursued a life alone in New York, left lifelong scars. Her birth name of

'The little bastard's got total recall,' Brando said. 'Every goddam word, he remembered.'

Lillie Mae was a beat away from Lula Mae, the given name of Capote's heroine, Holly Golightly, who also escaped to New York to reinvent her life. Brando and Capote's mothers died a few months apart in 1954.

It was the subject of Brando's mother that apparently came out as the interview stretched past 1 a.m. As Capote wrote in his piece, "I poured some vodka; Brando declined to join me. However, he subsequently reached for my glass, sipped from it, set it down between us, and suddenly said in an offhand way that nonetheless conveyed feeling, 'My mother. She broke apart like a piece of porcelain.... My father was indifferent to me. Nothing I could do interested him, or pleased him. I've accepted that now. We're friends now. We get along.'" Brando then went on to describe how growing up he'd come home to an empty house and an empty icebox. "The telephone would ring. Somebody calling from the bar. And they'd say, 'We've got a lady down here. You better come get her.'" Later, when Brando was on Broadway, his mother came to live with him in New York. "I thought if she loved me enough, trusted me enough, I thought then we can be together, in New York; we'll live together and I'll take care of her.... I tried so hard. But my love wasn't enough.... And one day, I didn't care anymore. She was there. In a room. Holding onto me. And I let her fall. Because I couldn't take it any more—watch her breaking apart, in front of me, like a piece of porcelain. I stepped right over her. I walked right out. I was indifferent."

It is hard, perhaps, for the modern reader to get a sense of just how stunning Brando's personal revelations would appear to an audience of the time. Today we are used to—and have even grown cynical about—tawdry stories of the rich and famous. But in 1957, the Hollywood studio system that for so long had carefully controlled the images of its stars was just coming to an end. Intimate details of an actor's personal life had been confined to disreputable scandal rags. Never before had the inner psyche of a star of Brando's magnitude been served up for public consumption, much less by a writer of Capote's stature. This was something new.

The morning after the interview, Brando had little sense of the peril in which he had put himself. Logan, having caught wind of the session, quizzed Brando's makeup man about it, learning that Brando had "enjoyed the evening immensely." Later, over cocktails with Logan, Capote couldn't help but crow. "Oh, you were so wrong about Marlon not being gossip," Capote told Logan, noting that Brando had talked about his mother's drinking and other personal subjects. "I don't believe it, Truman," Logan responded. "You must be leaving something out. He just doesn't reveal personal things." Capote must have tricked him somehow, he said.

"I didn't trick him," Capote countered. "We simply swapped stories. I made up stories about what lures my family were, and believe me, I made them lurid, until he began to feel sorry for me and told me his to make me feel better." Capote would expand upon this technique to his biographer, Gerald Clarke. "The secret to the art of interviewing—and it is an art—is to let the other person think he's interviewing you.... You tell him about yourself, and slowly you spin your web so that he tells you everything. That's how I trapped Marlon." In an interview with *Rolling Stone* more than 15 years after the fact, Capote observed, "You remember I told you how startled Marlon Brando was? I hadn't taken a note. I hadn't done a thing. I hadn't even seemed to be interested."

Sayonara ended up doing well at the box office and garnered Brando his fifth Oscar nomination. Near the end of production, Logan obtained the galley of "The Duke in His Domain," and it was as bad as he had feared. In addition to the revelations about his mother, it included Brando's negative critique of Logan, his self-centered theories on relationships, and his low estimation of many of his fellow actors. Brando was shaken, and immediately wrote Capote a long letter. In it he conceded that "unutterable foolishness" had led him to believe they were exchanging private confidences, and now his innards were to be "guy-wired and festooned with harlequin streamers for public musing...." He compared Capote to Judas, Benedict Arnold, and Attila the Hun. Capote later called it "the longest, most confused letter I ever received," but he never responded. Brando's tone in private was even more enraged. To his future wife, Anna Kashfi, he claimed that Capote had "got me stoned out of my gourd, straight vodka 'til two in the morning," but conceded that the "little bastard's got total recall. Every goddam word, he remembered."

The piece ran in the November 9, 1957, issue of *The New Yorker*. Capote was on Brando's permanent blacklist. "It was the only substantive interview ever suffered by Marlon," Kashfi noted, "and he regretted it."

Brando did visit his lawyer and publicist to discuss a lawsuit, but they dissuaded him after establishing that the facts in the story were accurate. "I didn't think of him as the press," Brando fumed to his publicist, Walter Seltzer. "I thought of him as a friend." For his part, Capote was unapologetic—then and later. "Marlon knows what I'm doing. Later he claims that he really didn't," Capote told Andy Warhol. "Well, of course he knew. He didn't in a *sense*—he knew I was doing an interview, but on the other hand, it was done by my own special method, which doesn't seem as though I'm doing anything at all. You know?" Capote added, "That thing was a total prediction of his entire life and what happened to him to this very moment. And all done in 40 pages."

Though Capote joked later that the piece wasn't really a "hatchet job," his comments in the years after it appeared tend to reinforce Josh Logan's view that the writer had it in for Brando. In Capote's interview with Andy Warhol, he observed that "To be an actor, you have to have absolutely no pride.... You have to be a thing. An object. And the less intelligence you have, the better actor you can be.... To be an actor at all requires a total immaturity, and takes a total lack

of self-respect." And about Brando, in a later interview, he said, "Oh, God knows, Brando thinks he's intelligent. Marlon looks at you with oh-poor-you eyes, as if he knows something you don't know. But the truth is, you know something he doesn't know: He's not very intelligent."

Less obvious, perhaps, was how Capote's encounter with Brando foreshadowed his own unmaking. After the piece appeared—William Shawn called it a "masterpiece," and it generated more comment than any *New Yorker* article since John Hersey's "Hiroshima"—Capote returned briefly to fiction in his popular novella, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, before undertaking the project he said he had long contemplated when he moved into journalism, the nonfiction novel. Reading about the murder of a family on an isolated Kansas farm, Capote convinced *The New Yorker* to let him investigate the case. Six years later, his book about the killings, *In Cold Blood*, was published, to universal acclaim. It remains a touchstone in American letters. But writing the book, dwelling in the imaginations and characters of other people, especially ruthless killers, broke something in Capote.

His drinking and drug use increased until he became better known as an eccentric fixture at Studio 54 and on late-night talk shows than as a writer or journalist. For the last 15 years of his life, he claimed to be working on his great American novel, *Answered Prayers*, but only a few chapters ever appeared in print, and the resulting firestorm over the thinly disguised characters and scandalous stories taken from Capote's Upper East Side tableaux caused his banishment from the glamorous world he had strived so long to cultivate. Capote died in exile in California in 1984. He was 59. Brando outlived him by 20 years, but they were not happy ones, overall. His son was embroiled in a high-profile murder, and his body of work consisted largely of smaller supporting roles. By his late seventies, he had packed more than 350 pounds on to his 5'9" frame, a victim of excess just as surely as Capote.

After Capote's profile appeared, Brando rarely spoke with reporters again, and he made only one public comment that I could find about their encounter in Kyoto (it is omitted entirely from his autobiography). In 1978, Lawrence Grobel traveled to Brando's private island in Tahiti for an extensive talk over 10 days. The topics were wide-ranging, from Brando's obsession with Native American rights to the OPEC oil embargo. At one point the talk turned to personal matters, which Brando placed off-limits. "I just don't believe in washing my dirty underwear for all to see, and I'm not interested in the confessions of movie stars." Most celebrities, Brando noted, just end up hanging themselves with their own words. "Did you feel that way with Capote?" Grobel asked. Brando demurred. "No, he's too good a writer just to write sensational claptrap," Brando said. "But he would bend or arrange.... Everybody editorializes. It's inevitable...."

"There is something obscene about confessing your feelings and your sentiments for all people to view," he added. "And who the hell is interested, anyway?" **CJR**

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Morgan Fairchild



Mel Gibson



Jennifer Beals

The red-carpet treatment

Set the Wayback Machine to April 9, 1984. The stars are filing into the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles for the 56th Academy Awards...

In 1984, gaining access to the Oscars was pretty easy. Calling from *Vanity Fair*, where new immigrant Tina Brown had just taken over as editor, I was able to secure photo credentials for the red carpet and backstage just a few weeks before the big day. (I used two cameras, one a first-generation point-and-shoot, so the results are a bit, well, Instagram-atic.)

Now, the red carpet is a much tougher ticket—and the Oscars are really big business. This year, according to the Academy, 195 media outlets vied for red-carpet shots (60 print, 56 TV, 40 photo, 26 online, and 13 radio); applications for 2013 slots are due by mid-November. Next come

the Oscar campaigns—an estimated \$100 million worth of screenings, parties, and “For Your Consideration” ads in the trades. The effort to snag a Best Picture nod can be worth it, especially for indie movies such as 2011 winner *The King’s Speech* (which saw a 925-percent box-office return on its budget, according to IBISWorld, a research firm). The Academy gets more than \$85 million a year in broadcast fees from ABC, and the network makes a bundle on the commercials. Then there are those big-ticket stars, swaddled by stylists in millions’ worth of designer fashions and jewelry. Really, that carpet is paved with gold. —Cyndi Stivers



Matthew Broderick



Cher and Val Kilmer



Shirley MacLaine



Michael Keaton



Glenn Close



Meryl Streep



Robert Duvall



Joan Collins



Daryl Hannah



Michael and Shakira Caine

Rules of the game

The sometimes nauseating, often fun,
and always absurd life of a movie publicist

BY REID ROSEFELT

I've always regretted that I never thanked Goldie Hawn for launching my career as a publicist. Goldie became my client when I was hired as an account executive at PMK in 1981, a movie PR firm in New York. (It is now called Pmk*Bnc.) I knew I didn't want this job and had already turned it down when my friend Anne took me to lunch. I'd set up a few interviews by that point in my life, but publicity was only a fraction of my professional and personal activities, which ranged from designing posters to composing music. In fact, at lunch I handed Anne my Walkman so she could hear some music I had written for the soundtrack of a Super-8 Adam Brooks feature called *Ghost Sisters* (the cinematographer was Jonathan Demme!). And yet she somehow talked me into taking her spot in this obvious hornet's nest. She said that this job would give me "power." I truly had no idea what that meant.

Anne was the New York contact for Hawn and Lindsay Crouse (an actress I loved). Anne took me to Circle Rep, where Crouse was appearing in a production of *Childe Byron* opposite William Hurt. Hurt introduced himself to me, as did John Lithgow, who had come to see the play. Maybe what Anne meant by "power" was that people I was in awe of would come over and say hello to me? Crouse was married to David Mamet, and later that night, it was the same deal—David Mamet giving me a firm handshake and saying, "David Mamet." Like I hadn't seen his plays and read every fricking word he'd written. Years later, I would rep three of his movies.

All this was cool, except I had no clue how to do the job. My little coffin room in the PMK office had a great view of the city that Anne had probably enjoyed, but when I got there they were building a skyscraper a few floors down that within a few weeks wallled in my view. Down the hall were the more palatial offices of Peggy Siegal and Harriet Blacker and, at the other end, in a junior suite like mine, Catherine Olim—now a powerhouse publicist but who then had only just been promoted. Everybody had an assistant whom

presumably they had hired and could fire, but I was stuck with Anne's assistant, a voluptuous young woman whose golden globes were always peeking out of blouses that would have made Jessica Rabbit blush. She was extremely popular with the men on the client list, which made her far more important to the company than I was, even if I had been able to do my job, which I wasn't.

Before this, I had worked for a small but prestigious distributor of foreign movies called New Yorker Films. I was hired because I had some graphic-design skills, and the ultra-cheap boss Dan Talbot realized that I could do their posters and catalogs in addition to threading projectors and filing. When I was hired, he said that I was going to have to work with the critics. As he saw my face light up at the prospect, he looked at me with pity. If you loved foreign cinema, New Yorker Films was a surreal place to be: It was a "Bertolucci on Line One" kind of place; it was a "pick up Fassbinder at the airport" kind of place. I set up press for Isabelle Huppert, Gerard Depardieu, Fassbinder bombshell Hanna Schygulla, and directors like Claude Chabrol, Werner Herzog, Joseph Losey, and Eric Rohmer. I had no idea how to manage publicity. All I did was show the films, which were really good. Editors came and requested interviews, and I made the arrangements. This kind of experience hardly qualified me to work at PMK.

The actual "power" at PMK rested in the partners, who all worked in LA: Pat Kingsley, Michael Maslansky, and Neil Koenigsberg. Michael and Neil came often to the office for meetings, but Pat never did during the short time I worked there. She was the one who signed and handled Goldie Hawn and Lindsay Crouse. Hawn was red-hot at the time, having just broken out with *Private Benjamin*. When the media wanted to interview her, they called Bill Murray of Celebrity Service (no, not *that* Bill Murray) and asked who Hawn's New York contact was; Bill would give them my number. I would call Pat up, my voice chirpy with excitement, and say,



Quiet on the set! The author, right, was unit publicist on Robert Redford's *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1988), shot in New Mexico.

"The Sunday *New York Times* wants to do Goldie!" and she would cut me off and say that no, Goldie didn't have a movie coming out and there was nothing to sell. This was something I'd never heard before. The purpose of media coverage is to fulfill our client's needs?

I quickly figured out how the game was played: We had a bucketful of stars and a reasonable number of superstars, and anybody who wanted to regularly fill a magazine cover had to cross swords with us (or people like us) or head back to their previous job at *Weekly Reader*. We made our biggest clients available only when we wanted to, and making them inaccessible increased their allure. Pat also served our clients by offering the kind of sage advice that prevented publicity debacles (indeed, milliseconds after Tom Cruise fired Kingsley, he was mid-flight over Oprah's settee). When disaster did strike, we were around to sweep up the mess with blandly manicured statements, Clintonesque dodgeball, and even the truth, if it was expedient.

The majority of what we did at this publicity firm was to strategically turn down most of the requests for our clients. Still, the relationship that agency publicists had with the media in those days was generally congenial. If you are booking *The David Letterman Show*, you know who is right for the show, and so does a first-rate publicist; in fact, it wasn't unusual for publicists to move over to top jobs in the media, and vice versa. The greatest misunderstandings were with publicity executives at some studios and distribution companies who pursued one-size-fits-all approaches to publicity, unlike our more strategic method. For each release, they created a phone-book-sized memo to show their superiors that every media outlet had been approached, and no stone had been left unturned. These documents are chock-a-block with hilarious boilerplate comments like "Claire promises to watch her screener soon," or "left several messages for Bernie," or my favorite, "Sarah is thinking it over," which usually means, "no, but I don't want to tell you that yet." After such time-consuming *mishegas*, the studio publicists were bewildered and stressed when they secured assignments and then the mean old personal publicists turned them all down.

Simply passing requests for Goldie Hawn to Pat Kingsley imbued me with a synthetic muscularity that lured top editors and talk-show bookers into my clutches. Once I had them on the phone, I'd ask if they'd seen the side-splitting new comedy *Under the Rainbow*, starring Chevy Chase, Carrie Fisher, and Billy Barty. As I said this, I felt like I had eaten a 50-pound bag of snot. Actually, I always felt like this. I was a midwestern rube who had fallen down a wormhole into an alien world I found shockingly cynical. I lacked the skills and emotional constitution for the job, and this caused me to be fearful and make mistakes. At the same time, I didn't want to be the kind of loser who quit after a few days, so I chose to be the kind of loser who accepts that every day will be a living hell.

It seemed that I was now a publicist, so I decided to do what I had done in previous self-reinventions—I was going to find out what a publicist was and try to turn myself into one. I would still hate my life, but I would be incredible at my job, dazzling them with my encyclopedic knowledge of international cinema, and everyone would admire me. Of the three PMK partners, I was most drawn to Kingsley—she was just so damn smart. I loved listening to her consider the pros and cons of every decision. In publicity, you can't do everything. Editors see other outlets as their competitors: It's *Vogue* or *Elle*; it's *New York* or *New Yorker* or *The New York Times Magazine*. What is right for a particular movie or client? Pat was also a chess player—she didn't think about what her client should do for just one movie, but also looked to the years ahead. If the client does a media blitz now, what is left for that personal project going into production next year? Nowadays, you can find dozens of young publicists who know how to say "no"—"no" is easy—but knowing when to say "yes" requires experience, wisdom, and in the case of Pat, a certain don't-f*ck-with-me confidence that she could control the story. So, Goal No. 1 in my publicity education: Grow a brain, learn everything there is to know about the media, and try to become, in my own way, like Kingsley.

Teacher No. 2, Peggy Siegal, was not the kind of person I would socialize with, but she was extraordinary at her work, and was very generous at sharing her expertise with me. Peggy was unstoppable; if she was onto a story, and say there was something in her way—say, Chicago—well, you'd just have to move Chicago. So I told myself that I would strive to become as relentless as Peggy, and when necessary, as impregnable as a titanium ingot.

Back in my days at New Yorker Films, I had encountered a guy named John Springer. He had represented Marilyn Monroe, Taylor and Burton, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Henry Fonda, Gary Cooper, Montgomery Clift, Walt Disney, and other legends. Springer embodied class: He was an impeccably dressed, highly cultured, and modest man. Trying to match John in the elegance department was a preposterous notion, but I decided it was essential that I get the kind of pedigree that comes from a high-quality client list.

I met Lois Smith when she hung out a shingle with Peggy Siegal, post-PMK. (Lois died, I'm sorry to say, just as this article was going to press.) Lois was the longtime publicist to Robert Redford, which is how I got to know him. She was given to greeting all and sundry with "Hello, ducks!" If

you were escorting her through the back alleys of a movie set, she'd say, "Lead on, MacDuff!" That would have been enough for me to love Lois, but there was much more. Once one of Lois's clients was involved in a messy divorce, and Lois had to face the cameras. Sitting at home, watching it on TV, I teared up, thinking if I ever got in a jam, I would want somebody as humane and calm and wryly funny to shield me from the slings and arrows of the media. My longtime client Errol Morris told me that when he looked for a lawyer, he wanted somebody he would pay by heaving ten pounds of raw meat over a fence, but I knew that if I was in a mess, I would want somebody like Lois at my back—a straight shooter who could kill with kindness and charm instead of a stiletto. Lois would become my numero-uno role model.

The press agent's reason for being is the art of persuasion, and there are as many ways to practice persuasion as there are human beings. It was my belief—and it still is—that few do it well, and I studied the best to find the way that suited me. Over time, I discovered that I was willing to turn down business (hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth, as it turned out) if it involved movies I didn't personally like. Not that I was noble; I simply couldn't, for the life of me, figure out how that would work—calling a journalist I respected and saying that a piece of crap was good? I would have enjoyed spending the money, but what would happen the next time I called? Of course I *did* like a lot of movies that the media hated, but if somebody got a call from me over the decades, they had a reasonable expectation that I might be calling about something decent. At PMK, I worked on a lot of great movies, but there were many occasions when I had to fib, and I didn't like the unpleasant taste it left in my mouth. After I was fired at PMK, I went back to my apartment and in no time, people were calling me to represent films. Having been schooled at PMK, I was ready.

Since I was a small child, I have worshiped actors and movies, and when I got older, filmmakers. It has been a great honor to have helped them in any way. As I look back over my career, I realize how much this work has given me and how lucky I have been to have fallen into it. Being a publicist has taken me all over the world and allowed me to hang out with a lot of fascinating people, and it's given me a fly-on-the-wall look at the world of fame and celebrity that very few people have. Journalists always think they know more than I do, but they never get to see what happens after their interview is over and they leave the hotel room.

The big secret of celebrity isn't that some famous people are meaner than the rest of us—although pampering does spoil you—it's that they are more likely to be unhappy. Maybe it's because insecurity and hurt fueled their drive to get famous, and when they get up the hill, they realize it hasn't solved any of their problems and the only way to go from that point is down. Then again, if they have pursued acting or directing purely for the love of it, rather than the desire to get famous, celebrity is generally as wonderful as you'd imagine it would be, with some occasional nuisances, like the paparazzi and annoying fans. Singer-actor Ruben Blades once told me, "Power doesn't corrupt—it reveals," and that's what I've seen my whole life. Many people take the



'Hello, ducks!' The unflappable Lois Smith (in her signature red coat, with Meryl Streep in 2004) showed how humane PR could be.

opportunity that success provides to crack up or die with greater velocity than those of us who have never been profiled by *People*. No matter how hard you try, some people just won't allow you to help them.

The biggest irony of my life is that I am against the idea that artists should *have* to do publicity. If we lived in a world in which people could discover movies without publicity, I think it would be a better world. The thing I love about movies in particular and art in general is that they contain things that are ineffable, and journalists want to ruin it by demanding that everything be explained, down to the tiniest detail. When asked by someone I trusted, I always advised them to treat the interview as a performance in which many words are spoken but nothing is ever given away. I'm not suggesting "talking points," because that is a very tedious way to get through a publicity junket. No, you have to be actively open and alive to the process of holding onto the mystery. That is the most essential thing an artist can ever possess, infinitely more precious than fame. **CJR**

Postscript: You may have noticed that I haven't explained why I never thanked Goldie Hawn for all she did for me. The reason is that I've never spoken to her, and have only seen her on Laugh-In and in her movies. Still, let me offer this article as a token of my heartfelt gratitude.

REID ROSEFELT currently coaches filmmakers in Facebook and social media marketing. His publicity credits include *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Stranger Than Paradise*, *Desperately Seeking Susan*, *High Art*, *All About My Mother*, *Central Station*, *Pollock*, and *Precious*. His personal clients have included Errol Morris, Ally Sheedy, Harvey Keitel, Cynthia Nixon, IFC, and the Sundance Institute.

Gross misunderstanding

What journalists miss about the movie business

BY EDWARD JAY EPSTEIN

The vast preponderance of news reporting about Hollywood concerns the weekly box-office race. It is offered free to the media every Sunday afternoon by Nielsen EDI at a low point in its news cycle, packaged with punning headlines and quotes by industry sources, so it can be reported as if it were a high-stakes horse race. In fact, it is, to borrow Daniel Boorstin's concept, a weekly pseudo-event whose sole purpose is to garner media attention.

Once upon a time, six decades ago, such box-office numbers were critical to the fortunes of Hollywood. The major studios then owned most of the large theater chains and made virtually all of their profits from ticket sales at their own theaters. But as of the late 1940s, antitrust rulings forced the Hollywood studios to divest their theaters, and the theater business evolved into multiplex chains that the studios did not control. As television, home video, pay cable, DVDs, and now streaming have become ubiquitous in American homes, the studios have radically changed their business model, moving their profit centers from the large to the small screen, making the box-office race less relevant.

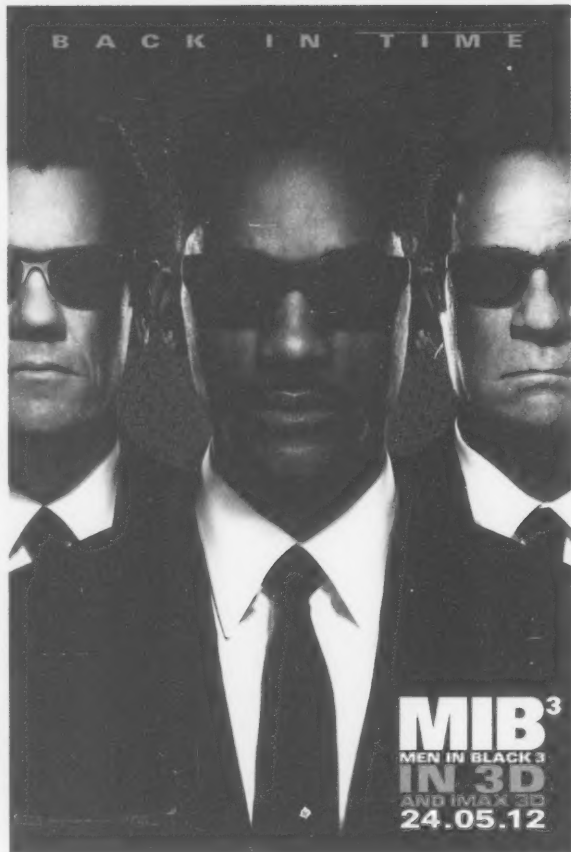
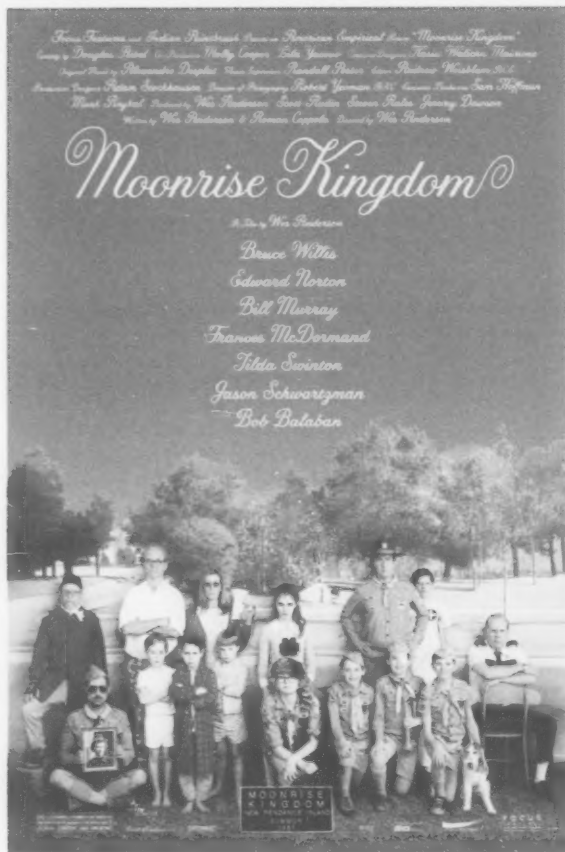
Even the numbers themselves are misleading. The reported "grosses" are not those of the studios but the projected sales of tickets at the movie houses in the US and Canada (which is counted by Hollywood as part of the US). Whatever the amount actually is, movie houses remit about 50 percent to the movie distributor, which then deducts, off the top, its out-of-pocket costs, which includes advertising, prints, insurance, local taxes, and other logistical expenses. For an average big-studio movie, these costs now amount to about \$40 million—so, just to stay in the black, a movie needs \$74 million in ticket sales. Many films don't make that much, and even those that do may not be profitable. For example, Disney, which hailed as a great success the nearly quarter-billion-dollar "gross" of its movie *Gone With the Wind* (released in 2000), wound up with only \$11.6 million from theaters, and since the movie cost \$103.3 million to make, its

theatrical run ended up in the red. This is not uncommon. Most Hollywood movies nowadays actually lose money at the American box office and make it from ancillary markets.

Meanwhile, the outcome of the box-office race has little importance to theater owners these days, because each of the major multiplex chains books all of the studios' wide-release movies. Their only concern is the total number of people who show up and how much popcorn, candy, and soda they buy, since that's where their real profit comes from. In numerical terms, the movie-going audience has been shrinking since 1948.

The studios focus on the cumulative revenue their movies take in over many platforms, including both domestic and foreign movie houses, DVD stores, pay-TV output deals, and TV licensing. Even though its ancillary benchmarks can be higher when a movie is No. 1 at the box office, the film can still fare very badly in its cumulative results. Consider Paramount's 2005 adventure film *Sahara* (and here I should disclose that I served as an expert witness in a lawsuit involving its finances). Although it was No. 1 at the opening-weekend box office, it is one of the biggest money-losers in history. Based on a Clive Cussler best seller, the film cost \$160 million to produce and \$81 million to distribute, and wound up losing \$78.3 million. On the other hand, some movies that finish at the bottom of the weekly pile, such as Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom*, and Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan*, can ultimately take in more money than movies that finish ahead of them.

It certainly helps to be first on a weekend, but not all weekends are equally valuable. There are holiday weekends that can produce as much as 10 times the revenue as those in the slack season (when teenagers return to school). A Fourth of July second- or third-place movie can take in far more than a first-place finisher in October, since the total pie is so much larger. And films that open in the summer, no matter where they finish, will also earn more than fall films from



David vs. Goliath Wes Anderson's quirky *Moonrise Kingdom* had more box-office staying power than megabudget *Men in Black 3*.

Christmas DVD sales—due to the usual four-to-five-month embargo on the release of movies on DVD, summer films become fresh product on the market at holiday time.

Even in the era of global marketing campaigns, the US box office does not necessarily affect foreign revenues, which now are more important than the domestic take. For major movies, such as *Avatar*, more than 70 percent of the theatrical revenue is now earned overseas.

Nor does the box-office race provide an accurate measure of popular taste, since it lumps together movies that open on thousands of screens with those that choose to open on a few dozen screens, hoping to build gradually, benefitting from good reviews and strong word-of-mouth. Take, for example, *Moonrise Kingdom*, which opened on May 25, 2012, in only four theaters in two cities, and finished in 15th place, while *Men in Black 3*, which was first, was booked on 4,248 screens. Indeed, when studio marketing departments want to know the actual audience appeal of a movie, they track the per-screen average, the drop-off between Friday night (when there is no word-of-mouth) and Sunday, and the percentage drop after the first and second week. *MIB3* was all but dead after three weeks, while *Moonrise Kingdom* moved to 924 theaters, and was still drawing audiences in late September, the 19th week of its run.

What a box-office victory actually measures is the breadth

of the opening and the efficacy of the studio's marketing arm: In other words, based on a barrage of 30-second TV commercials containing snippets of the film, which most moviegoers will have seen an average of seven times that week, how many people will show up on Friday night? This is a job the studios do amazingly well, but it has little to say about the intrinsic appeal of the movie.

To be sure, the race produces bragging rights every week for the winning studio's marketing department, which then exploits the "No. 1" title in newspaper ads (for which studios spend, on average, about \$4 million per title). And of course the publicity derived from this game further enhances the studios' revenue.

But why does the media play along in the promotion? Generally, it is the only "news" available in the entertainment news cycle surrounding the opening. Any real digging into the economics of a movie takes considerable time, since the studios tightly seal all relevant information, such as the terms of distribution deals, financing, subsidies, and stars' compensation, through Non-Disclosure Agreements. Even extras at times must sign NDAs (as I found out when I was an extra in *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*). By the time the economic picture becomes clear, if indeed it ever does, the news value of the project has faded.

At the same time, the media's fixation on the box-office

race diverts its attention from the ongoing transformation of Hollywood's business. It neglects the reality that today, the six major studios get less than 20 percent of their total revenue from showing their films in American movie houses. Most of their money comes from another, nearly invisible source: licensing their intellectual properties. Each studio has a vast library of thousands of movies, animated shorts, and TV series it licenses out to worldwide cable networks,

Studios get less than 20 percent of their revenue from US movie theaters.

pay-per-view TV, and broadcast television. A top executive at Time Warner recently did the math for me, demonstrating that between 85 and 90 percent of its entertainment earnings comes from licensing its movie and TV titles to television; it is more or less the same story at the four other largest studios. (Paramount, because it ceded its television production arm to CBS when they split, is the only major studio without a television production arm.) The reason that licensing is so immensely profitable is that studios do not have to pay advertising, print, or logistical costs, as they do when distributing a movie to theaters. Almost all money received—except for residuals paid to actors' and others' guild pension plans—goes to the bottom line. The same is true with the new business of licensing products to Internet companies, such as Hulu, Netflix, Apple's iTunes Store, and Amazon, for streaming. The continued cranking of this money machine depends on the studios' retaining absolute control over these intellectual properties—a requisite that, given the threat of digital piracy, is reshaping strategies for how they release movies. For example, the studios' entire system of "windows," in which a film's payoff is optimized by delaying for many months its release on video, pay television, and other platforms, may have to be compressed, if not entirely abandoned, to counter this threat. There is also new urgency to studios' international diplomacy, since minimizing the availability of pirated copies requires the assistance of governments. No matter what political opinions their movie stars espouse, the corporate executives behind the scenes now must play nicely with those in power.

The screenwriter William Goldman famously explained the economics of Hollywood this way: Nobody knows anything. By focusing on the box-office race that is spoon-fed to them each week, journalists may entertain their audiences, but they are missing the real story. By neglecting the changing economics of Hollywood—and the politics that flow from it—they leave their audience, much like a movie audience, in the dark about what is really shaping Hollywood. **CJR**

EDWARD JAY EPSTEIN is the author of *The Hollywood Economist* and *The Big Picture: The Logic of Money and Power in Hollywood*.

Avoiding pilot error

By tracking its users' intent to watch fall shows, TVGuide.com handicaps the new TV season

Television viewers are all over the place these days, tuning in via computers, tablets, and phones, at odd times, and in unlikely places, many far from ye olde couch. "Appointment viewing"—watching a show during its regular prime-time broadcast—has dipped from 93 percent to 79 percent of viewing in just the past year, according to TVGuide.com research. At the same time, TV providers want to know where to invest their marketing budgets, and journalists covering the industry and audiences alike want to know what is likely to survive before they invest a lot of time and attention in something new.

The TVGuide.com Watchlist is starting to provide clues, according to Christy Tanner, exec VP and general manager of TV Guide Digital (not to be confused with *TV Guide* magazine, which is now a separate company). Two years ago, she says, the site added an "I'll Watch" button to its TV listings—analogue to a Facebook "Like"—and the response to that encouraged the TV Guide team to build a tool that could track user interest more definitively. (There is plenty of tech talent in-house, since the core of the business is its proprietary listings; in fact, Tanner says the staff is split evenly among editorial, business, and engineering.)

The Watchlist aims to give viewers all their options for finding what they want to watch: via broadcast, on-demand, streaming, and DVD. Users create a profile, and then choose TV shows, movies, actors, and sports teams they want to follow. "It's all the ways to watch in one place," says Tanner. "It's the TV Guide of the future."

It's also the user behavior of the future. "When we launched [on TVGuide.com] in August 2011, we thought everyone would just wait till fall to add the new shows," says Tanner, but surprisingly, "people were adding new fall shows before they were even on. We found that *New Girl* was the most 'added to Watchlist' show by mid-August, and that became the breakout show of the season." Audience taste predicted eight of the top 10 new shows, and this year, users started to add shows as soon as they were announced at the industry upfronts in May.

In August, TV Guide released an iOS app incorporating the Watchlist, and usage surged. As of October, Tanner reports, "over 750,000 [users'] Watchlists have been created—275,000 of those in the last six weeks. By mid-September, we ended up with a top-10 list which right now seems pretty credible." Because of the commitment users demonstrate by creating a profile, plus the built-in tune-in reminders, TV advertisers have sponsored the project "since Day One," she says. (An integrated ad unit prompts users to "Add this show to your Watchlist.")

Doesn't Twitter offer similar hints? Yes, but any mention of a show, positive or negative, is counted. "I'm not dismissing Twitter data," says Tanner. "But for tracking TV as a horse race in which ratings are the currency, last year we found Watchlist was a good indicator, and this year it looks like it will be a solid indicator of ultimate ratings success." Stay tuned...

—Cyndi Stivers



Drowning in atmosphere Jay A. Fernandez filled an entire notebook in one long day on the set of a 2006 *Poseidon Adventure* remake.

ON THE JOB

Esprit de corpse

*What it's like to be
embedded—on a movie set*

BY JAY A. FERNANDEZ
PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID STRICK

With an explosion of light, the screaming starts.... This place is wrecked—an entire ballroom flopped on its head. In the middle of the floor (which used to be the ceiling), crushed chandeliers slump like twin crystal wedding cakes left in the sun too long. Playing cards, balloons, dishes, and chairs litter the tiered space; broken glass and broken bodies are scattered everywhere. Dozens of dazed and bloody people stumble about, trying to adjust to this unexpected horror. They're failing with great success.

As I struggle to my feet amid the unmoored throng searching for their missing wives, brothers, and daughters, one thought keeps intruding with the brutish force and graceless inevitability of each new reality-TV show: Screw your loved ones. I need a bathroom NOW....

Okay, rookie mistake. Note to self: Before going on set, void the six cups of coffee you nervously gulped down since arriving at wardrobe.

SO I BEGAN A 2006 PIECE FOR THE LATE, lamented *Premiere* magazine about Wolfgang Petersen's colossally unnecessary Warner Bros. remake of *The Poseidon Adventure*. The original disaster epic, released in 1972, boasted a dozen Oscar winners in its cast, including Ernest Borgnine, Gene Hackman, and Shelley Winters (swimming in her granny panties!). The concept for my story was to spend the day as a participating extra on the set of what was supposed to be a giant blockbuster (the production budget was \$140 million).

I was nervous, as I am for just about every assignment, but some instinct told me to go all in: with the right observational filter on (curiosity, of course, but also an eye for the absurd), and the



determination to maintain relentless documentation. To photograph the experience, *Premiere* had assigned David Strick, the warped maestro who always finds a way to capture the organic bizarreness of behind-the-scenes Hollywood. Strick's involvement not only added an indelible element to the published piece, it also provided a reason for potential sources on set to talk to me—really, how many extras have their very own photographer tailing them?

As I wrote in *Premiere*, the week before, I had gone to the studio lot so the wardrobe department could take my measurements, and when I arrived for the big day, I had a blood-and-oil-streaked tuxedo ready to go. After some artful makeup and a briefing by several assistant directors, I waited in the holding tent with the real extras for the director to require our services.

Extras—actually, many of them like to be called background actors or artists, depending on whether they consider this a calling or a way to dodge a subpoena—are lowest on the filmmaking food chain, quietly nestled beneath the lot-tour tram drivers. “Everybody’s replaceable,” one veteran told me with 20 years of resignation in his voice. Background work typically involves an extended day full of lengthy stretches of punishing boredom, lingering uncertainty, potential injury, and banal indignities. And yet, the camaraderie of fellow travelers, the exposure to successful actors, and the chance to hone “the craft” provide a genuine satisfaction for many of these unsung artisans.

When the call came, we trudged into Stage 16, where Petersen had also shot parts of *The Perfect Storm*. After every take, I whipped out my notebook and jotted down the crew interactions, the physical details of the set, the reactions from the actors and extras, the smells and sounds of the experience. Then I would tuck it away in time to start yelling in terror again. Periodically, I would get a little time with Petersen, who noted that background actors provided physical and emotional context: “Fifty percent of the feel of a scene like this is coming from them,” he said.

I also snuck quick interviews with the extras, every chance I got. One woman with an oddly intense affect

Assignments like this are now rare. There is now so much material available online everyday that there is very little mystery left about how movies are made.

let loose, unprompted, with a “spitting mad” rant about how computer-generated imagery was killing her career. According to her, the filmmakers pull certain notable background actors out and make detailed digital scans of their dimensions that they can later use and manipulate onscreen without needing the actual actor to be present and paid. “I am not a CGI puppet!” she cried.

Most seemed much more laid-back. A guy named Dave with an elegant gash across his face said, “Just relax and have a good time, that’s what it’s all about.”

Strick took hundreds of pictures that day. After a while, I managed to lose my self-consciousness about him. I was too consumed with observing, eavesdropping, questioning, scribbling notes—plus “acting,” of course. I was “on” for nearly 14 hours, and though I was exhausted at the end of the day, I’m convinced that having all of that real-time reporting—an entire standard reporter’s notebook filled—was the key to delivering what I consider one of my best yarns.

Sadly, since I wrote this piece in 2006, these types of assignments have become almost extinct, as entertainment journalism itself has capsized. (One could be forgiven for assuming that the corpses in this photo are people I had to murder to get the *Premiere* job.) The disappearance of in-depth monthly film magazines and rise of the quick-hit trade story that now permeates most of the industry-focused blogosphere is one reason, but it’s also a result of filmgoers being completely saturated by the factoids and ephemera of the movie world. There is now so much material available online every day about every step of the filmmaking process—through filmmakers Tweeting set photos, studios releasing seven different teasers and endless making-of featurettes, obsessive fans stealing smartphone pictures during production—that there is very little mystery left about how movies are made.

Film reporters traditionally derive much of their value from being somewhere the average reader can’t go, talking to talented people who cinephiles never meet, being in on things that the casual observer never hears about. While much of this is still in play for entertainment writers, the current all-access-pass climate on the Web means that journalists have little to reveal by offering access behind the scenes. Meanwhile, thanks to the likes of *US Weekly* and *TMZ*, a lot of that entertainment “news” is really celebrity content. Hard-news outlets either compete for the same juicy scraps or risk irrelevance by devoting dwindling resources to longer, more in-depth pieces that fewer people have the time or attention to read. Just as in the business they cover, the money’s in the sparkle and spectacle, not the thoughtful and thorough.

Before shooting, my little group gauges the camera positions and ruefully acknowledges that, given our placement at the back left of the set, it’s unlikely that any of our hard work will make it onscreen....

Finally, everything is set: One hundred background actors, Kurt Russell in the middle, and dozens of crew, all ready to make some art, baby. Petersen comes on the “God mike” and gives us a little first-shot-of-the-day pep talk, ending with “G-G-G-G-Go for it!”

The dripping water is cued...

The fire bars go hot...

The lights are extinguished...

A tense pause as we all lie still in the silent darkness...

And: “Background.... Action!” CJR

JAY A. FERNANDEZ is senior writer and news editor of *Indiewire*. He recently worked for *The Hollywood Reporter* and wrote a weekly column called “Scriptland” for *The LA Times*. He has written for dozens of publications, including *Time Out New York*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Variety*, *USA Today*, and *Los Angeles*.

Taking the seen-it route

Why toil as an entry-level slave when you can watch a lot of TV, write it up, build a following—and perhaps even get paid?

BY SARA MORRISON

Since I could talk, I have talked back to the television. *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* was great—I loved that segment on how orange crayons are made—but really, he could have tried harder to change up the voices he used for those puppets. King Friday is a man; Henrietta Pussycat is a female and also a cat. They shouldn't sound the same. Also, why was Mr. McFeely able to exist in both Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood and the Neighborhood of Make-Believe? And shouldn't someone have told Mr. Rogers to come up with a less creepy name for his mailman character than "McFeely?" Come on now.

By the time I was nine, my mother was concerned that her daughter was too negative. She offered me a dollar if I could make it through an entire television show saying only positive things. I suspect she was also motivated by the desire to watch just one freaking TV show without her daughter's snarky running commentary.

I did not win that dollar.

No matter. I've earned it thousands of times over writing recaps of television shows for TelevisionWithoutPity.com (known to its fans as "TWoP"). The recap is, essentially, an episode summary—a very detailed one. As in, 7,000-words-for-an-hourlong-show detailed. You can read a recap and feel like you've just watched the show it described. But you don't really read them to catch up on an episode you missed; you read them because of the commentary wrapped around that description. The best recaps are equal parts funny and insightful, as if you were sitting on the couch watching the show with the writer. They appreciate what the show did right—and also what went wrong. There is, deep down (sometimes very, very deep down), a love for the show being recapped—even when the recapper explicitly says he hates it. He comes back next week, doesn't he? And so do you.

I was a college sophomore when I found TWoP. It was a joyous day—an entire website devoted to mocking/appreciating shows the same way I did! My audience was no longer limited to whoever happened to be in the living room. I emailed one of the site's co-founders, Sarah D. Bunting,

asking for the job for which I was obviously perfect. I was politely rejected. I wrote two recaps and sent them in anyway. Bunting emailed me back that they were "pretty good," posted them on the site, and sent me a check. Since then, I've recapped 13 series. That's hundreds of recaps and millions of words devoted to shows that were very good, like *House*; very bad (*7th Heaven*); both good and bad, somehow at the same time (*Survivor*); and some I've mercifully forgotten about (*Rubicon*, *Men in Trees*, that summer reality show on Fox that was *The Bachelor* except everyone was overweight...oh God, I just remembered—it was called *More to Love*).

What was once one website's niche product has become a key feature of entertainment news sites, including The Onion's A.V. Club, The Huffington Post, Gawker, HitFix, TVLine, *Entertainment Weekly*, *TV Guide*, *New York*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Wall Street Journal*, E! Online, and CNN. Recaps cover everything from critically acclaimed shows like *Breaking Bad* to whatever *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* is supposed to be (yes, *WSJ* makes sure its readers are up on all things Honey Boo Boo). There are summaries of shows just hours old and reviews of *Star Trek* episodes from 45 years ago.

"Every site's doing recaps," says Josh Wolk, editorial director of *New York* magazine's pop-culture vertical, Vulture.com. (The browser title bar—"Vulture—Entertainment News—Celebrity News, TV Recaps, Movies, Music, Art, Books, Theater"—gives you an idea of the importance Vulture places on those recaps.) When Bill Simmons's ESPN-owned



Summary judgments Angel Cohn, managing editor, and Daniel Manu, site director, call the shots at the New York office of Television Without Pity.

sports and pop-culture blog Grantland.com launched last year, recaps were in the mix, alongside features written by a slate of big-name journalists. "It was absolutely part of Bill's vision to have recaps on the site from the beginning," says Grantland executive editor Dan Fierman. "They've become a staple of any site that really deals with cultural commentary."

For an up-and-coming writer, recapping can be the online equivalent of breaking into a newsroom as a copyboy. A much more efficient launching pad, actually: You get a byline in a publication with a national (or even international) audience. While small-town papers shrink and fold—taking entry-level positions along with them—recappers have gone on to write for *Time*, *The Washington Post*, NPR, and *The Atlantic Wire* (and, of course, *CJR*). Some recappers have written books (fiction and nonfiction) and TV series (scripted and reality). Others have created their own profitable websites.

Recapping also trains writers to combine snark and a conversational tone with insight and information—a desirable skill to have these days. The style of writing in the best recaps—relaxed and personal, with more commentary than reportage—has become increasingly common in journalism, especially in pop-culture coverage (which has itself become increasingly common in journalism). Since news outlets no longer have a monopoly on information—minutes after one breaks a story, it's been re-posted and aggregated all over the Web, easily available, usually for free—what makes a site and its writers distinct are their voices. Take it from Daniel Manu, TWoP's site director since 2007: "How you write things is often as important as what you're writing about."

The origin of the recap dates to 1994, when Daniel Drennan started writing "wrapups" of *Beverly Hills, 90210* on the pioneering New York City online bulletin-board system called ECHO (short for East Coast Hangout, a sister of the

Well). His take was entertaining; users clamored for more. The wrapups snowballed in size and scope, incorporating opinions on bad writing and terrible acting and commentary on the decadence of the shows' characters and the pettiness of their problems. He pointed out receding hairlines and terrible outfits and told personal stories tangentially related to what was on the TV screen. Drennan moved the wrapups to his own website the next year. He wrote thousands of words every week; the length, he says now, was intentional: "I do remember everyone talking endlessly about the lack of attention span of online readers, and so I attempted to challenge this, seeing instead the website as providing bottomless pages for me to attempt to fill." Readers didn't seem to mind. "To this day, the website gets tons of hits for the wrapups," he says.

Sarah D. Bunting and Tara Ariano met on Drennan's site's forums and quickly became friends, bonding over their shared love of pop culture and TV. When nascent broadcast network The WB began airing a *90210*-esque show called *Dawson's Creek* in January 1998, Bunting and Ariano added commentary about that show

to Drennan's forums. By the time the second season of *Dawson's Creek* began in October 1998, they'd struck out on their own with *DawsonsWrap.com*. Ariano's husband, David Cole, did the design; Bunting and Ariano provided the content.

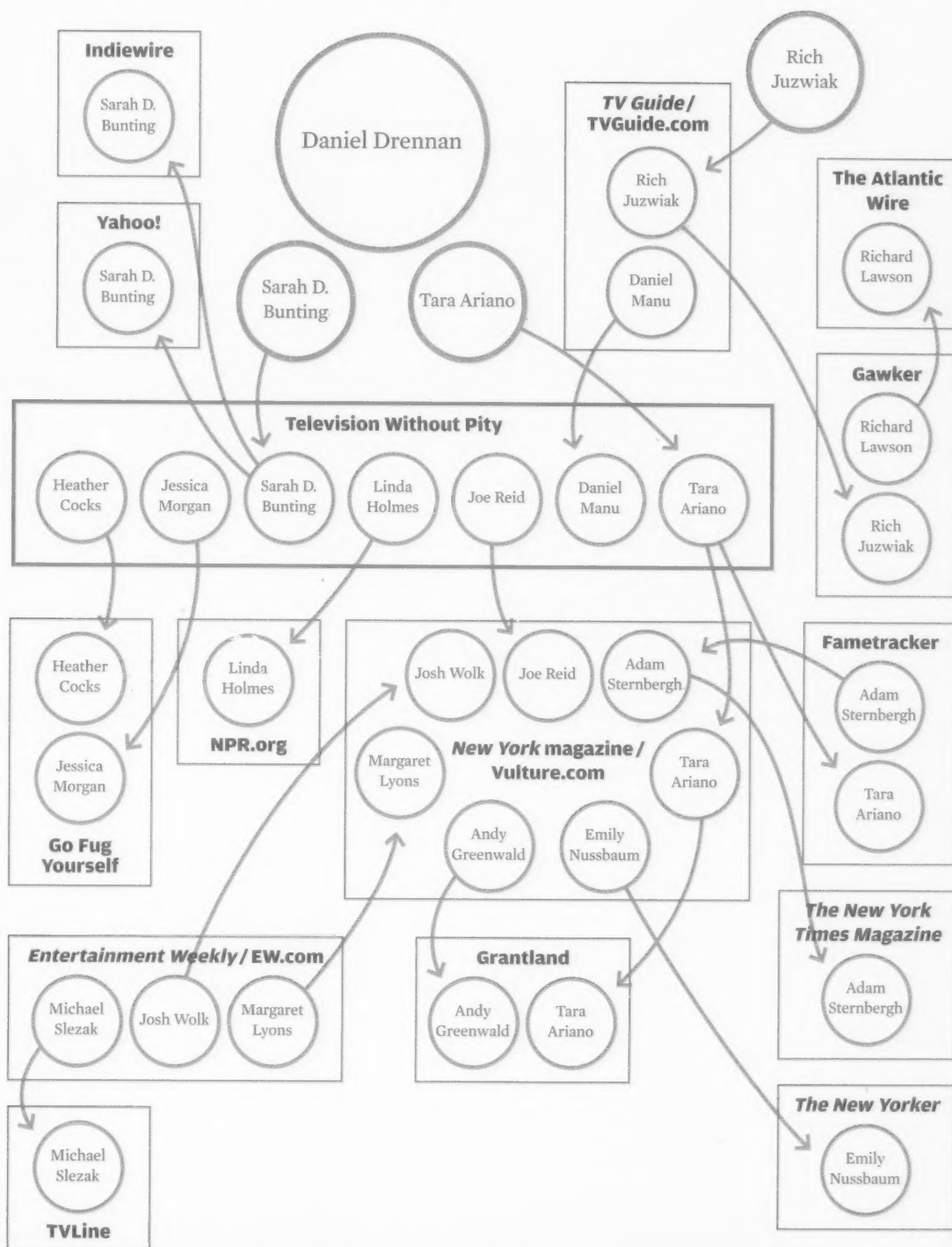
Bunting says they were "inspired" by Drennan; Drennan says they "outright stole" his style. Bunting hired me, so I'm in no position to say who's right. In any case, though the results were similar, their mindsets couldn't be more different. Drennan says his wrapups were a "proto-Marxist analysis of American culture," which was becoming increasingly homogenized due, in part, to television. The Princeton-educated Bunting thought television should be taken seriously as an "artistic medium and valid topic of discussion." Says Bunting wryly: "Like, I read books also. But I have a bunch of opinions on *Real World: Boston*." Drennan's wrapups asked people to do something better than watch TV; Bunting and Ariano's recaps asked TV to do something better for the people watching.

Dawson's Wrap was picked up by an ad portal. In those dotcom boom days, it generated enough traffic to make the portal money "hand over fist," Bunting says. So they scaled up. The WB had a lock on teen dramas—perfect recap fodder—and the other networks (both broadcast and, increasingly, cable) had plenty of guilty pleasures as well. Dawson's Wrap became *MightyBigTV.com* in 1999 to reflect its expanded roster of shows. The writing staff grew accordingly. The new site also began calling its content "recaps" instead of "wrapups."

One of the first shows on the expanded site's roster was a new NBC series that seemed destined to be a ridiculous mess. Bunting recalls thinking: "A show about the White House with Rob Lowe in it? Like, that'll be killed in three episodes." *The West Wing* ran for seven seasons and won 26 Emmy Awards, and its popularity on the site showed

All in the family

A select TV recappers' genealogy



that there was demand for (and a way to write) recaps of quality shows. Then *Survivor* debuted in 2000, and networks began rolling out reality shows. The site had plenty to work with.

By the time Mighty Big TV changed its name to TWoP, its success was well-documented (*Time* rated it as one of the 50 Best Websites in 2002). Other sites wanted a piece of TWoP's action; soon Salon began recapping shows. Josh Wolk started his "Real World Watch" column on *Entertainment Weekly's* EW.com in 2001. One of Wolk's first orders of business when he moved to Vulture in 2009 was to "multiply" its TV-recap output so the site would become a destination in its own right. "They're good for traffic," Wolk says, "provided it's A: the right show, and B: the right writer."

And the right writer doesn't have to wait around to be discovered. Rich Juzwiak, one of the genre's better rags-to-riches stories, started by recapping *Being Bobby Brown* on his personal blog. That led to VH1 offering him full-time recapping work. He's now a staff writer at Gawker, where one of his early pieces was "Tune In, Recap, Drop Out: Why I'll Never Recap a TV Show Again" (filed under Gawker's "Television Without Pretty" category). Juzwiak is quick to credit recaps as being "integral to [his] career," but he's not sure if they're worth much beyond that. "Like, who cares about the seventh episode of the eighth cycle of *America's Next Top Model*?" he asks. "Well, I did, so much that I spent, like, 10 hours writing about it. But now, who cares?"

Even *The New Yorker* feels the recap's influence. Its site does not (yet) offer recaps, but its television critic is Emily Nussbaum, previously of *New York*. She recapped *Lost* for Vulture, a process she says she found "brutal." In one of her earliest Slate pieces, 2002's "Confessions of a Spoiler Whore," Nussbaum detailed her obsession with the show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and drew parallels between "plugged-in" TV fans' discussions on the Internet and literary criticism. Nussbaum read TWoP's *Buffy* recaps and posted on the site's forums. A few years later, she ran afoul of TWoP's strict comment-posting rules and was banned after defending the show *Firefly* from its recapper's criticism (Nussbaum: "*Je ne regrette rien!*"). She credits TWoP and immersive TV sites like it with starting her career as a cultural critic, and for helping her realize television's place in the culture today.

But Nussbaum has mixed feelings about the value of recaps these days, with good reason. In the last five years, the Internet has become saturated with them. Whoever posts a recap first has a competitive edge. Television producer and writer Garrett Lerner discovered TWoP about 10 years ago and says he felt like he was reading the work of "a new brand of critic" who was "younger, hipper, edgier, meaner, and snarkier"—but just as legitimate as the old guard. (Lerner knows what it feels like to get the recap treatment, including from me—he was a co-executive producer on *House*.) A decade later, he finds that other sites' recaps seem "slapdash"—just a few paragraphs and a request for comments. "It's kind of turned me off to it," he says. Nussbaum agrees: "I don't think the entire environment should consist of people's first drafts." More and more, though, it does.

That kind of recap is probably here to stay. Even TWoP,

which still offers recaps posted (and written) several days after an episode airs, has given in to its readers' demand for speed, and now offers "weecaps"—shorter versions of the recap, posted a day or two after the episode airs—as well as blogs and video content. All of these were introduced after NBC Universal bought the site from its three founders in 2007. Ariano, Bunting, and Cole stayed with TWoP for a year after the purchase, then moved on.

In their wake, the recap has become such an established form that there is a second wave of practitioners, who have studied and appreciate the medium and wish to refine it further. Consider EW's Darren Franich, who came to EW.com as a production intern in 2009 and is now a staff writer. He says he had always wanted to recap for EW.com; when *Jon & Kate Plus 8's* usual recapper needed a substitute, he got his chance. Franich believes he hit his stride while recapping *Jersey Shore*. His approach was to give the show "much more respect than it deserves"—to treat it as seriously as he would a fine piece of literature. Franich can recap an episode of a show, complete with overarching themes, in just a few hours. If I'm the *Beverly Hills, 90210* of recappers, Franich is the savvy, more self-aware *Dawson's Creek*.

With the increasing emphasis on speed and quantity over quality, I wonder how the recap will keep up. "You'll have to predict what's going to happen next," Juzwiak jokes. He might not be far off. Ariano recapped *Saturday Night Live* for Vulture last season by writing a "Saturday Night Live Sketch Predictor" the day before each episode aired. Some sites get recaps up so quickly that West Coast readers can read the recap before the show airs in their homes.

And then there's Twitter. Jezebel recently pronounced *Parks and Recreation* actress Retta "the best TV recapper on the Internet" for her 140-character-long live-tweets that have no context unless you're watching the same show at the same time. Ariano and Cole will soon launch Previously.TV, which already has its own "live event" Twitter account called "Previously.TV Now." Recapitulation, meet reaction.

I hugely appreciate what recapping taught me—that I could regularly turn out 7,000 words a week that were full of description, analysis, commentary, and, well, *me*. I'm also the beneficiary of good timing: I started my career when being able to express a unique take in an entertaining way was valued. And not just as a recapper: I can link most—if not all—of my subsequent writing and journalism work back to the website I came across one night in my dorm room.

I stopped by TWoP recently to read comments about my last recap, for the season finale of HBO's *The Newsroom*. Some of the show's fans did not appreciate my generally critical view of the series. "Do yourself and the rest of us a favor," one woman wrote. "Get a job you are qualified for (I'm sure there's a fast food joint near you that's hiring)." She demanded that TWoP replace me with a "real writer."

Maybe it's not too late to win that dollar from my mom... **CJR**

SARA MORRISON is a CJR assistant editor.

Lost and found

In 1967, an ambitious young reporter broke a promise to a troubled source and inadvertently made her famous. Forty-three years later, he set out to find her and apologize.

BY BRUCE PORTER

On October 27, 1967, senior editors gathered for the Thursday story conference to see how things were shaping up for the coming issue of *Newsweek*. A scrim of cigarette smoke hung over the room. Foreign had the Vietcong ambush that nearly wiped out a US Army company north of Saigon; Nation, the 100,000 peaceniks noisily besieging the Pentagon. Back-of-the-book was selling a think piece on how poorly the media had covered the riots in Detroit and Newark that summer. Eyes glazed over. Ho-hum news fare for the '60s. That stuff might do for inside, grumbled executive

editor Osborn Elliott, in his honking Upper East Side accent. "But, c'mon boys, what've we got for the cover?" Unease pervaded the room.

That's when Shew Hagerty, noted for his smoldering pipe and sense of irony, spoke up. You guys obviously aren't into it, he said, but it's the Summer of Love out there. Kids from all over have been flocking to Haight-Ashbury and the East Village, crashing in hippie pads, spacing out on the sidewalks. And things haven't gone well, especially in the East Village. Along with tolerating loose living, the place is a dangerous slum. There've been assaults, rapes; emergency rooms are bulging with overdoses. Parents are taping notices up on light poles, searching for missing children. There was that story in the *Times* last week about the rich girl, Linda Fitzpatrick, from Greenwich, and her boyfriend Groovy—bludgeoned to death in a tenement basement on East 10th Street.

Oz's eyes lit up. "That's it," he exclaimed. "That's our cover. We'll call it 'Trouble in Hippieland.'" Nothing did better on the newsstand than scaring the shit out of mom and pop out there in Middle America. But the *Times* already had Linda Fitzpatrick. *Newsweek*, he said, needed a runaway of its own.

Time was short—deadline loomed late the next day. Hagerty fired off queries to all domestic bureaus, ordering them to scrape up bumner hippie stories. The magazine's star writer, Harry Waters, would do the survey piece. Finding our runaway? That job was handed to me. Yes!

Just 28 and freshly hired, salivating for a coup—Columbia J-School, *The Providence Journal*. Now, *Newsweek*. This would be the day I arrived.

It seemed late to go hunting for the girl myself, much quicker to work through someone with contacts. That would of course be Abbie Hoffman, the counterculture impresario with the tumbling hair. Sure, Abbie said on the phone, he could get us a runaway; would there be, like, some payment? Over an expensive lunch at the Gloucester House, a *Newsweek* hangout on 49th Street off Madison, I laid out our requirements: mid-to-late teens, a good talker, should come from somewhere beyond the Hudson River, photogenic. And, most definitely, she must be having a bad time with the Flower Child experience. This story was an object lesson, not a siren song.

Two hours later, Abbie called back with the goods. She'd be waiting at a place called the Something Coffee Shop on Second Avenue at 10th Street. Look for blond hair and a gray-and-green-striped sweater. Her name was Marcy.

I found her sitting in a booth staring glassily out at the sidewalk scene—girls in long dresses, boys wearing headbands and surplus Army jackets. Jefferson Airplane was softly rocking over a scratchy speaker. Marcy had straight, streaked hair hanging to her shoulders. Her face was slightly pudgy but pretty, in a malt-shop way. Abbie had explained our mission: I was writing a story about runaways and wanted to interview her. Sure, she said. Just

don't use her name. "Oh, we won't," I assured her, clicking my ballpoint into operation. She was high from a steady intake of speed, STP, acid, codeine—whatever friends gave her—and her words gushed out in a breathy voice, with no periods or paragraphs.

Marcy said she had run away from Flint, MI, after lengthy warfare with her father. To punish some transgression, she said, he had killed her pet turtle and torn up her vegetable garden, and was not nice to her boyfriend, a drummer named Twig. That May, before her 17th birthday, Marcy packed her

She became pregnant during drug-fogged sex and borrowed \$200 for an abortion, then illegal, performed by a woman just out of her teens.

clothes and, with her pet cat, caught a ride to Detroit, where she fell in with a motorcycle gang called The Outlaws. The cat got sick and died. Marcy grew frightened of the guys' carousing, and she moved in with a 28-year-old pusher she called the Walrus, from her favorite book, *Alice in Wonderland*. Stoned one day, she injured her leg jumping out of a moving car, and developed an infection after the Walrus treated her with morphine. She said it turned "beautiful colors, but it hurt." He got her to a hospital in Windsor, Ontario; she spent two weeks recovering, and then hitchhiked to the Newport Folk Festival. "After that," she told me, "I ended up here."

Since then, she had lived in two-dozen crash pads, slept on park benches, and was trying to lose weight by taking speed. Someone beat her up with a milk crate in Tompkins Square Park. She became pregnant during drug-fogged sex and borrowed \$200 for an abortion, then illegal, which was performed in an apartment by a woman who was just out of her teens and made crude jokes during the procedure. Her idea now was to earn money to help friends buy a bus and go see the Grand Canyon.

I'd become dazed by all her distress, having had little experience with people lost and in pain. But, never mind, I knew what I'd been sent for, and deadline loomed. I handed her the few dollars in my pocket, said to wait there for the photographer—don't worry, he'd do a profile shot, not her full face—and split for the office.

Writing the piece, I wondered what to call her. I'd used "Marcy" in the draft because that was her name, but told Shew Hagerty I'd promised not to identify her. He said he liked the sound of "Marcy," so let's keep it. There are hundreds of Marcys running around, he reasoned, and besides, we're not using her last name. "Fine with me," I said.

Headlined "Gentle Marcy: A Shattering Tale," the story

blew everyone away. It earned me a write-up in the front of the magazine. I got a scribbled "Hear, hear!" from Oz on his special notepaper—he wasn't too free with those. It also created a sensation among readers. Hundreds of letters poured in, many of them with checks for Marcy. One little girl from San Francisco sent a quarter and a dime. "I have enclosed my week's allowance," she wrote. "Please give it to Gentle Marcy." To top it off, *Reader's Digest* said it would pay \$1,500 to reprint the story, a giant fee back then.

After a few days, the glory faded. Then a researcher at the magazine told me she'd just heard a radio interview with Marcy on the New York rock station WNEW. I got the tape. The interview was conducted by a newsman named Steve Young, who opened with some commentary trashing the hippie movement, how unwashed they were, and deluded. A case in point was this girl Marcy, whom he claimed to have found at the Diggers Free Store—no mention of the *Newsweek* piece. He'd persuaded her to talk by letting her and some friends sleep on the floor of his apartment.

He titled his bit "Marcy, a Child Again." When she came on the air, you could tell from her speedo speech she was flying high. Much to my dismay, she led off by saying how devastated she'd been by the *Newsweek* article. This reporter had paid her for the interview, she said, and promised not to use her name, only he did. I'd also mentioned Flint, so her parents could easily identify her, something I hadn't bothered to consider. Her mother would be crushed; she'd thought Marcy was working at Macy's.

Young then cut in, his voice lowered to a whisper, like some guy in an alley selling a hot watch. "Would you like to call your parents?" he asked. "Oh, wow, you don't mean it!" she said. "It's early in the morning, but I'd love to talk to my mother." He slid the phone to her, and you could hear her dialing. Her mother answered, but you could catch only Marcy's end of the conversation.

"Momma, this is Marcy," she said in a rush. "Momma, you know *Newsweek*, you haven't seen it, have you? Don't let Daddy read it." She then broke into sobs and had difficulty getting words out. "Please, Momma, please still love me when you read it. Oh, Momma, I really love you. I thought you wouldn't love me anymore. I told them I loved you but they didn't print that. It wasn't like they said. Oh, Momma, don't cry. Don't cry."

The conversation went on for five minutes, and I was feeling lower and lower. Young ended the program by saying that the next morning he drove Marcy and her friends over the George Washington Bridge and got them maps of the United States. "I last saw Marcy on the ramp of the New Jersey Turnpike," he said. "Those maps don't show where Marcy [big pause for dramatic effect] can be a child again."

What a creep! I thought. But then, how did his interview differ from what I'd done, using her like some disaster mannequin? I'd given no thought to what it really must have been like jumping out of that car, venturing alone into an apartment for a botched abortion. I felt deeply crummy for cavorting to Hagerty, using her name, and her city. He'd said the story would have lost credibility without those details, but I should have argued, "So what?"



Bad trip For years, the author used his experience from this 1967 cover story in the classes he taught at the Columbia Journalism School as a cautionary tale for aspiring journalists who might be tempted to betray a source.

THE YEARS ROLLED BY. I LEFT *NEWSWEEK*, BECAME A MAGAZINE writer, and taught journalism. Now and then I'd think of the Marcy story, and the tape: "Please, Momma, please still love me when you read it." Sometimes I'd play it for my class, as an ethics exercise, always hoping students would find some saving grace in what their professor had done. I mean, parents had to hear this stuff, didn't they? I got few takers.

Then, a couple of years ago, after retiring as a professor at Columbia Journalism School, I ran into the documentary filmmaker Dan Loewenthal at a party in New York. I forget why, but I told him about Marcy, that I couldn't get her out of my mind. "Well, why don't you go out and find her?" he said. "And apologize." He'd help me. And he'd make a film about our search.

Other than her first name, all we knew was that she had a brother, Arthur, and a sister named Jeanie. And there was that telephone call over the old rotary phone. We thought if we slowed down the tape and counted the clicks, we could come up with her number. Then, we'd look that up in a reverse phone directory from 1967, find the family's name

and address. They'd be long gone, of course, but we could nose around the neighborhood, locate someone who knew them, and maybe learn what had happened to Marcy. Piece of cake.

Not actually. There are no audible clicks. Rather, it's a time-lapse thing—the number of milliseconds that elapse between dialing a nine, say, and when the rotary winds back to zero. The nine and zero are easy to distinguish, but not the nine from an eight, or a five from a four. Computer experts we found on Craigslist translated the sound impulses to digital images, but none was confident he had the golden number.

There were other avenues, one of which was her high-school yearbook. A Flint librarian told us that back then she would have attended one of three high schools, and been listed as Marcy somebody-or-other in the freshman class entering the fall of 1954, when she was 14. That intrigued us enough that in January 2011, we flew to Detroit, rented a car, and drove the 50 miles up to Flint. It was cold, with about a foot of snow on the ground. Before leaving, we'd called the *Flint Journal* and convinced them to do a story about our search, hoping to reach someone who had known Marcy. We got to Flint on a Friday, and the story was scheduled to run that Sunday.

One of Flint's misfortunes was to have been the birthplace of Michael Moore, whose documentaries regularly paint it as the unhappiest place to live in America. Beyond a couple of ritzy neighborhoods filled with Tudor mansions, it's dominated by one-story frame bungalows that house the former work force from the abandoned Chevrolet and Buick plants. Aside from unemployment numbers, bad news in Flint

comes in the form of arson and violent crime. The city averages 300 to 400 fires a year. And as Dan and I drove around, we saw plywood signs nailed up on trees saying things like, "No Hoes Allowed. Children At Play."

At the Flint Central Library, the yearbook gambit also proved a dead end. No Marcys in the 1954 books, or the classes on either side. "Marcy," we figured, could well be a nickname for Marsha, Martha, Marjorie, Margaret, or Mary. It seemed hopeless. We also tried checking the "Marcy" birth announcements that the *Flint Journal* used to run in the '40s and '50s. No luck.

We ended Friday in low spirits.

Saturday morning, we were back at the library. I was up in the microfilm room, and Dan was downstairs at a table poring over more yearbooks, when a presence loomed in his peripheral vision. He looked up to see this aging biker dude with a gray ponytail, his wallet secured to his blue jeans by a chain. "You the guys looking for Marcy?" he asked in a challenging voice. He'd seen the story in the Sunday issue of the *Journal*, which had appeared online that day, ahead of schedule. "I

knew her back in the '60s. Her real name is Margaret. The last name is Bachman."

"Whoa, whoa, wait a minute," Dan sputtered. "Wait, wait." He said he needed to get his camera operational, go find Bruce. No, the biker said he wasn't going to wait.

"Well, what's your name?" Dan asked.

"Call me 'Moon,'" he said.

"Is that your name?"

"No, but you can call me Moon." Moon then spun on his heel and walked out of the library.

From then forward, our search unfolded in a rush. Through the obit registry at the *Journal*, we found Marcy's father and mother, Reinhold and Edith Bachman, who had died in the '90s. The old man had run a hobby shop in downtown Flint, The Hobby House. The family had lived in the west end of town. We also learned that Marcy now resided in Hawaii, of all places, married to a man named Thomas Won, and that she had four children. Via Google satellite, we zeroed in on their house, a big-looking spread outside Waikiki. Could Marcy be a well-off matron? Was a trip to Hawaii in the offing? Piña colodas in a Tiki hut, watching the curlers roll in? We felt like dancing a jig.

There was still daylight left to Saturday, so we drove out to Marcy's old house to film the street for background, and talk to whoever was now living there. It was a white bungalow, surrounded by a chainlink fence, looking forlorn in the dirty snow.

I went up and knocked on the storm door while Dan shot me from the sidewalk. Deep-throated barking exploded from within the house, and a large-ish, middle-aged woman appeared, shouting at the dogs to stay back. She had glasses and a head of curly brown hair, and was smiling inquisitively. I told her we were looking for someone named Bachman who had lived at this address a long time ago.

"Well, I'm a Bachman," she said.

"You're a Bachman," I said, uncomprehending.

"Yes, I'm a Bachman. I'm Margaret Bachman."

"Margaret Bachman? You mean...you're Marcy?!"

"Yes, I'm Marcy."

Speechless for a second, I quickly recovered and told her I was the guy who'd written the *Newsweek* story so many years ago, about her running away to New York, did she remember? Did she remember! She immediately lit into me as if she'd been waiting all these years for that guy to show up at her door. That was an awful, awful thing I did to her, taking advantage of a young girl, how painful it was, how horrible it made her feel, and how it had so upset her family, how embarrassing with friends and neighbors reading it. And she was 19, not 17 like I'd written, and she didn't even know what STP was, although she did admit to a liking for LSD.

After agreeing that I'd done a terrible thing and apologizing a dozen times, I told her this man with the camera who was coming up the walk right now was my associate, Dan Loewenthal, and that we were here to do a film about the



Flashback The author with Marcy in Flint. After making, and losing, a lot of money in real estate in Hawaii, she says, she bought the house she grew up in and lives quietly on her Social Security check, tending her organic garden.

consequences of such careless and thoughtless journalism, hoping to make amends and be forgiven. And on and on.

Eventually she relaxed, and invited us into her living room, now a little crowded, what with us and her large rescue dogs, including a boisterous Rottweiler she'd acquired to scare away criminals. Speaking in a voice you could probably hear several houses away, she ran briefly through her life after being dropped off that day at the Jersey Turnpike. She and her friends hitched to Haight-Ashbury, she worked as a waitress, attended and then dropped out of college, knew Country Joe and the Fish and Timothy Leary, was present at Altamont. She then moved to Hawaii, where she got married and had three boys and a girl, made and lost a lot of money in real estate and the restaurant business, and, after getting divorced, moved back to Flint in the late '90s. She bought out her sister's share of her parents' house, and was now settled into a quiet retirement, living on her Social Security check and tending her organic garden.

As it grew dark, we said we had to go, but made a date for lunch the next day. It wasn't until we reached our motel that I realized I'd forgotten to tell her about the story that was running tomorrow on the front page of the *Sunday Journal*. Thanks to the digital age, it would include not only the reporter's interview with Dan and me, but also the original *Newsweek* story, as well as the radio interview on WNEW. All of Flint would now listen in as Steve Young slid that old phone over to the clueless flower child and asked in his unctuous fashion: "Would you like to call your parents?"

It was as if I'd never learned a thing. Oh, Marcy, I thought, I've done it to you all over again! **CJR**

BRUCE PORTER, the author of *Blow*, is working on a book for St. Martin's Press about a woman who was kidnapped by guerrillas in Colombia while working as an undercover operative for the DEA. The producer, Dan Loewenthal, plans to finish the documentary about Marcy in spring 2013 and submit it to film festivals in North America and Europe.

DANIEL LOEWENTHAL

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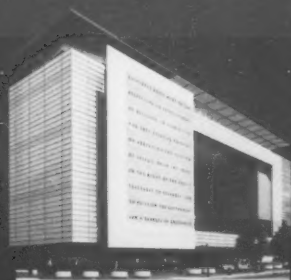
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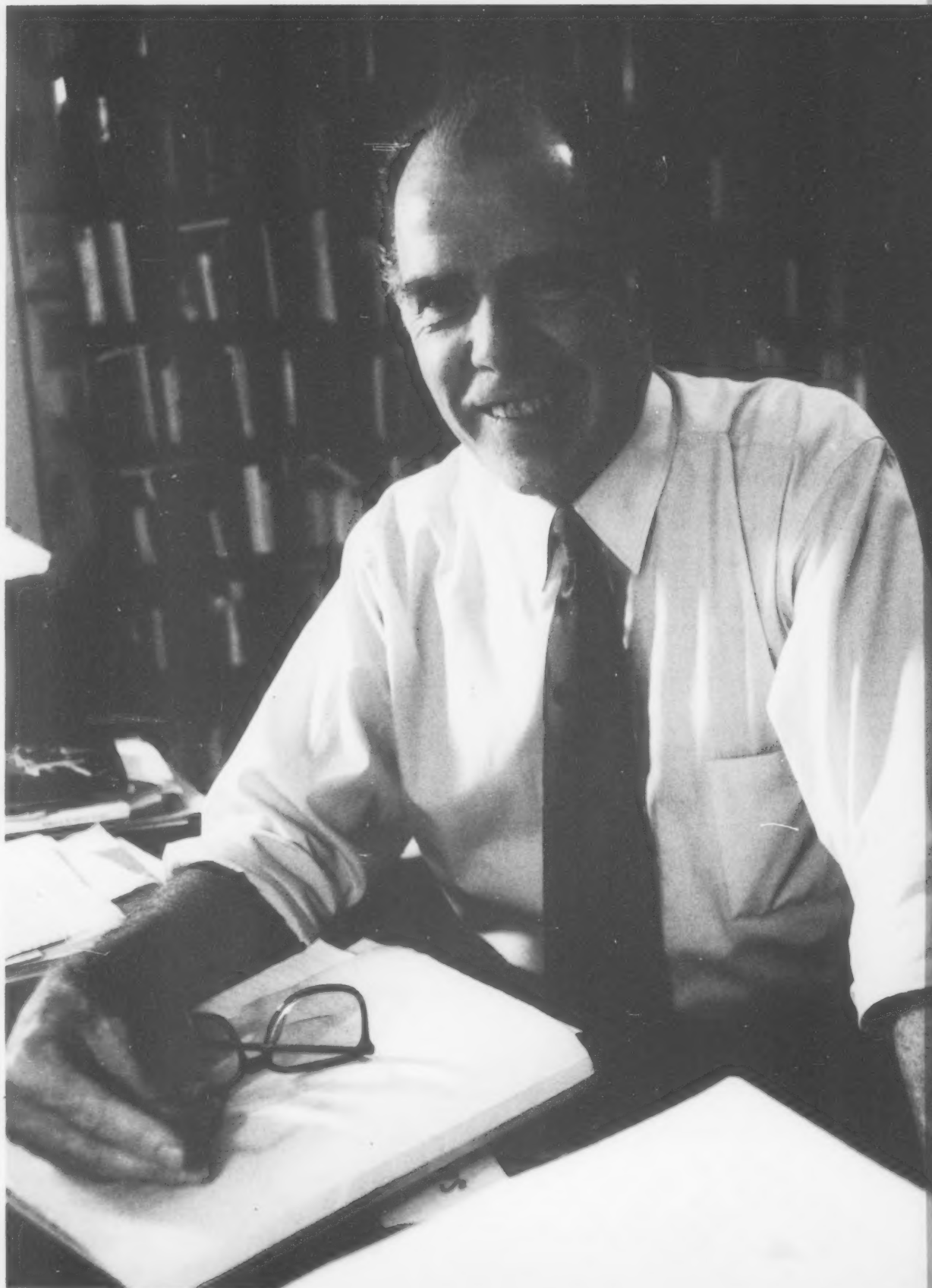
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Ideas + Reviews

SECOND READ

Human capital

In *O Albany!*, William Kennedy pays homage to the hard-to-love city that is his novels' greatest hero

BY STEFAN BECK

ON JANUARY 16, 1928, WILLIAM JOSEPH KENNEDY SUFFERED A MISFORTUNE OF birth only slightly preferable to bastardy. Having drawn his first breath, he studied his surroundings and found himself a newly minted Son of Albany. The gravity of his situation may have been lost on him, but not for long. By the age of reason, in the Catholic sense, he must have accepted the sordid truth of his paternity. Albany was a bookie and a gambler, a bootlegger and a dipso, a pimp and a john, a boss and a stooge. "Of all the miserable, wretched, second-class, one-horse towns," wrote the architect Henry Hobson Richardson, "this is the most miserable."

Albany was far from the action, halfway between Manhattan and the Canadian border. Where its political climate was strictly *smoke-filled backroom*, its actual one, much of the year, was *walk-in meat locker*. A youngster like Kennedy might don a cassock and surplice in the morning, quaking for his soul as an altar boy; survive a pointless fistfight at midday; bring his robes to the "Chinaman" for laundering in the afternoon; and at night hang around street corners or grocery stores, looking for a good chance to sin. It would have been a decent enough life, growing up in the shadow of Irish Catholicism and political corruption—but for a kid with ambition, who needed it?

In 1956 Kennedy lit out for San Juan, Puerto Rico, taking a position as assistant managing editor of the *Puerto Rico World Journal*. In 1959 he became a founding managing editor of the *San Juan Star*, where he was Hunter S. Thompson's boss, and one can see Kennedy portrayed by Richard Jenkins, as "Lotterman," in Bruce Robinson's 2011 adaptation of *The Rum Diary*. In Puerto Rico, Kennedy found himself engrossed in a picture book of 19th-century Albany. He had to face it: "[San Juan] was not engaging my soul, and that Albany picture book was." In 1963, he went back to Albany for good.

Ironweed, the 1983 novel that made Kennedy's name—it won the Pulitzer Prize the next year—is about a man returning to Great Depression-era Albany at Halloween. Though he bears no resemblance to Kennedy, Francis Phelan, a guilt-wracked, alcoholic hobo, illustrates how a man becomes magnetized to home, despite the compelling reasons to get lost. As the story begins, Francis, "[r]iding up the winding road of Saint Agnes Cemetery in the back of the rattling old truck... became aware that the dead, even more than the living, settled down in neighborhoods." The neighborhoods of men and memory, the ever-changing anima of a city, are Kennedy's perennial subjects, and never more explicitly than in the other book he published in 1983, the essay collection *O Albany! Improbable City of Political*

Wizards, Fearless Ethnics, Spectacular Aristocrats, Splendid Nobodies, and Underrated Scoundrels.

Kennedy's remarkable project began in 1963, when an *Albany Times-Union* editor, Walter Hawver, asked Kennedy for a series showcasing the city's neighborhoods. This Kennedy completed between 1963 and 1964. Later, revisiting those pieces at the request of Albany's Washington Park Press, he "found them all misshapen by time and their prose as flat as Mesopotamian root beer." Thanks to his insistence on revising them, what might have been a very minor, parochial pamphlet—the sort of thing you fan yourself with at the Historical Society—became a detailed portrait of America in microcosm, and proof that a penetrating eye can turn a one-horse town into a metropolis deserving of its place in posterity.

In his overture, "Albany as a State of Mind," Kennedy calls his project "an attempt to strike a balance as to Albany's legend. Even iniquity has its charms: consider what Milton did with Satan." Nothing in Kennedy's Albany is sentimentalized, trivialized, romanticized, or demonized. He confers dignity on vagrants and prostitutes without turning them into glowing unfortunates. He can mull the causes and effects of political corruption without assuming the mantle of a thundering reformer. He was, after all, a reporter before he was a novelist, and the essays in *O Albany!* are products of a fact-finding mission that transformed into a newspaper position and in turn into a life's work. Here, then, are some of the things he demanded to know:

"Why was I an only child in a vast family of brothers and sisters and untrackable cousins? ... Why did my uncles marry so late or not at all? Was there such a thing as culture in Albany? Could you get rich without being in politics? Who was this Van Rensselaer fellow? Why was Eddie Carey called the Squire of North Albany and what precisely was a squire in Albany's lexicon and why did Eddie live at the top of Van Rensselaer Boulevard and why had I always lived at the bottom in one of his houses? Why was the North End, my neighborhood, almost exclusively Catholic, and Irish, and Democratic?"

There were saloons and bars that only seemed innumerable, except during Prohibition, when Albany boasted speakeasies that were actually uncountable: 'All you needed to create a speakeasy was two bottles and a room.'

Kennedy's intention was to answer a few of those questions—to learn more about "the city's ethnic blueprints, its political history and the nature of its peculiar people"—but probably not to be consumed by them. Fate, and Albany, had other plans.

O ALBANY! IS DIVIDED NOT CHRONOLOGICALLY but into six sections of loosely associated essays. The first and last, "The Magical Places" and "Closing Time," are the loosest in this regard. The former serves to familiarize the reader with Kennedy's avowed Albany boosterism; the latter consists of acknowledgments and parting reminiscences. The middle sections get right to the point. "The Neighborhoods" is a thorough guided tour. "Nighttown" is a trio of essays about the fine distinctions between a "sport" and a "swell"; how Albany negotiated Prohibition; and the murder of Jack "Legs" Diamond, Albany's favorite gangster. The "fearless ethnics" who appear in Part Four, "Some of the People," are Jews, Italians, Germans, and Blacks—the Irish being segregated in Part Five, "Long-Run Politics: Wizardry Unbound."

This patchwork is a vastly more interesting way to learn about a city than the traditional chronological history, but it presents two difficulties. One is that the individual essays tend to jump around in time, and not just because Kennedy is writing about neighborhoods and institutions down through the decades. Almost as often, it is a function of his style, which is pleasingly torn between the journalistic and the literary, the present-day and the poetically historical. This tension of styles and techniques means that everything in *O Albany!* happens out of anything like order, and however vivid a *sense*

of Albany the reader walks away with, he will never have a prayer of explaining the city's chaotic progression from a "primeval and savage wilderness" opened up by "those agents of the first Patroon, and the Dutch West India company pioneers" to whatever shape Kennedy found it in in 1983.

The second difficulty is related, and similarly forgivable on the grounds that a great book is preferable to a merely educational one. As Kennedy has eschewed a chronological trudge, he is free to allow his own preoccupations, literary and personal, to guide his investigations. His account leans heavily on three famous Albanians: Erastus Corning 2nd, Daniel Peter O'Connell, and Jack Diamond. To know these names and what they mean is to know, perhaps, enough about Albany—and certainly enough about Kennedy's Albany—even if they belong to just one century of its long history.

It is not unusual to hear in 2012 about machine politics, though the preferred phrase, for obvious reasons, is "Chicago-style politics." Whether the latter term endures because Albany has been overlooked or because it has been let off the hook is a matter of speculation. The fact is that Chicago's Mayor Richard J. Daley served from 1955 to 1976, and Albany's Mayor Erastus Corning 2nd was first elected in 1941 and made it to 1983, the auspicious year of *O Albany!*'s publication. That's eleven terms. Though the record never made it into Guinness, it did wind up in Ripley's, in July 1982, alongside "nineteen wingwalkers and a chicken that laid eggs for 448 straight days, believe it or not."

The boss of Albany's Irish-Democratic political machine was Dan O'Connell, who had grown up with Mayor Erastus's father, Edwin, making Dan and Erastus's "eventual union

in politics...really the extension of a long friendship"—a family friendship, in any case, or even an existing alliance. Kennedy's essays "The Democrats Convene" and "They Bury the Boss: Dan Ex-Machina" form an operating manual for machine politics. What did the machine provide? "[T]he job, the perpetuation of the job, the dole when there was no job, the loan when there was no dole."

O'Connell got his start in politics after being elected tax assessor in 1919, and abuse of the assessor's office played a major role in the machine's control: Back a non-Democratic candidate for any office and one might find the assessment on his property higher than expected. Electoral fraud was, naturally, in the natural order of things:

One city water inspector was arrested passing out envelopes to voters at a polling place, and when searched he had 45 envelopes in his pocket, each containing \$4. This looked rather like a man purchasing votes. But he said he was contributing to a charity fund to buy food and shoes for needy folks and the polling place was the best spot to find them. He was released, probably because such ingenuity could not go unrewarded.

At Dan O'Connell's funeral, "only if you were seventy-nine years old...could you have voted for a Democratic candidate for mayor of Albany who hadn't been of Dan's choosing." He and his longest-serving mayor had survived Governor Thomas Dewey's corruption investigations. Corning had survived service in World War II—during a mayoral term. If these men had a lock on Albany politics, it was in part because Albanians encouraged it.

It is easy enough for a journalist to loathe corruption, even corruption that keeps the peace or keeps the people happy. It is harder for a novelist. The journalist Kennedy "[wrote] stories that complicated [the Mayor's] life." The novelist Kennedy was delighted when the Mayor approached him to collaborate on a book in which Kennedy would be able to say whatever he liked, as would Corning. The book never came to fruition, but an essay, "Erastus: The Million Dollar Smile," did. The result is an excellent example of Kennedy's candid, psychologically astute, and above

all *sympathetic* portraiture. The essay gets to the heart of Kennedy's essentially novelistic journalism. Whether because he retains some vestigial sense of Original Sin, or simply because he grasps human folly, he is capable of regarding any man as an equal, a potential friend, and certainly a fascinating subject for study—no matter how wicked.

Kennedy never met the gangster Jack Diamond, but one guesses he would have held his own there, too. Diamond, a Prohibition-era rumrunner, hijacker, and bootlegger, was killed under mysterious circumstances inspected carefully by Kennedy in "The Death of Legs Diamond." Diamond's criminal career, romantic life, and death are also given a monumental treatment in Kennedy's novel *Legs*. The novel, narrated by Diamond's lawyer, is a valuable study of how seductive a legendary figure can be, even if he is evil. The Diamond of Kennedy's essay is a much smaller and uglier character, albeit still fascinating. To read the two treatments side by side is a lesson in how facts may undergird a novel, but, more important, in how to take the shine off a legend when dealing in reality.

NOWADAYS, RARE IS THE WORK OF nonfiction without a subtitle chugging across its jacket as long and noisy as a passenger train. *O Albany!*'s is as long and noisy as the worst of them, but it may be forgiven—partly because Kennedy was something of a pioneer in this, and partly because nobody would buy a book with "Albany" in its title unless it bore a subtitle promising the sensational. The trouble with Kennedy's *Political Wizards*, *Fearless Ethnics*, *Spectacular Aristocrats*, *Splendid Nobodies*, and *Underrated Scoundrels* is that it omits an important class of characters. Albany's great buildings, in Kennedy's telling, have a life of their own.

Take Union Station: In "The Romance of the Oriflamme," Kennedy writes that it "was magical because it was more than itself, which is how it is with any magical man, woman, or building." Kennedy ponders it from the vantage of a "child of modest means": "The child knew only that trains passed over the Van Woert Street trestle and chugged up the Cut to the West, knew

railroads had magic all right because in the kitchen there hung a sepia print of a grandfather and two granduncles standing beside Engine 151 on a clear day in the century's teens."

This rhapsody continues for two hundred words. Suddenly, Kennedy goes journalistically deadpan. The Station, "a gift of munificence from the New York Central to Albany," is made of pink Milford granite, by the architectural firm "organized to complete the work" of the city's aforementioned detractor, H.H. Richardson. The station opened its doors on December 17, 1900. A *Times-Union* reporter remarked upon its magnificent ceiling, chandeliers, mosaic floors. The inaugural ticket transaction is described, down to the denominations of coins given in change. Of his facts, Kennedy asks: "Trivial?" and answers, "As trivial as a day in December 1968 when Union Station's closing was only days away." He makes the reader fall in love with the place, only to reveal that he has been eulogizing it all along.

Many of the buildings celebrated in *O Albany!* are gone. Their impermanence fascinates Kennedy as much as their greatness does. The John Van Schaick Lansing Pruyn branch of the Albany Public Library, where Kennedy endured the "hallowed trauma" of reading profanity in *Of Mice and Men*, was also leveled in 1968, by a wrecking ball. If one is alarmed, in 2012, to find that public libraries resemble homeless shelters, he will be chastened to learn that the Pruyn back in young Kennedy's day was a haven for "winos and vagrants, crazies and shopping-bag ladies, and ordinary knights of the road of the Depression years." Perhaps encountering books and the low life under one roof was a tonic, enabling Kennedy to write books about the low life without sentimentalizing or trivializing it.

IT IS ESPECIALLY PAINFUL TO READ about Albany's lost restaurants. Keeler's (56 State Street) satisfied the appetites of John Philip Sousa, Grover Cleveland, Thomas Edison, and Augustus Busch, among others. How many others?

1,500 patrons were served daily by 178 employees—48 waiters, 6 busboys on every shift, 27 cooks and assistant



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There was the Kenmore Hotel, whose famous Rain-Bo Room hosted such musicians as Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, and Bix Biederbecke. There were saloons and bars that only seemed innumerable, except during Prohibition, when Albany boasted speakeasies that were actually uncountable: "All you needed to create a speakeasy was two bottles and a room." Many, of course, were anything but humble. O'Connor's, which Kennedy identifies as the largest, boasted a massive and ornate bar that came to be preserved in a Cohoes, NY, restaurant. The more common fate of such places was to be preserved only in booze-addled memories. The same goes for the houses of ill repute described in "The Gut: Our Boulevard of Bluest Dreams," an essay about a vice-driven neighborhood that has passed out of existence.

Because Kennedy is obsessed with change, with the passing of great eras—Ozymandias is forcefully invoked in his farewell to Union Station—the structures he describes are, in their ability to accumulate history, to become vulnerable, and to pass away, every bit as human and sympathetic as the people who inhabit this history. They also serve as an oblique warning. The completion of the imposing South Mall (now generally known as Empire State Plaza) in the 1970s, a boondoggle Kennedy describes in "Everything Everybody Ever Wanted," leveled an entire neighborhood and transformed much of Albany's downtown into a featureless concrete office park. The old Albany gave birth to colorful, larger-than-life men like O'Connell and Corning. The coldly functional, Modernist expanse of Empire State Plaza incubates dull bureaucrats and grim-faced clock-watchers.

Though he never says it outright, Kennedy seems to believe not that a city gets the buildings it deserves, but, funny as it sounds, that buildings produce the people they deserve.

BY THE TIME *O ALBANY!* APPEARED IN 1983, Kennedy had already written four novels, *The Ink Truck*, *Legs*, *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game*, and *Ironweed*. He has written five novels since then—his most recent, *Chango's Beads and Two-Tone Shoes*, an astonishing late-life critical success. Not one of these could have been written absent Kennedy's lifelong project of getting to know the city he once despised. Many of the real people described in *O Albany!* resurface, wearing disguises and assumed names, in Kennedy's novels. Yet it is a missed opportunity to treat *O Albany!* as a guidebook to the fiction. One wants to compare it to the New York chronicles of Joseph Mitchell, but Kennedy's task was more difficult than Mitchell's. He had to make us care about a place most could live without. If *O Albany!* is a guide to a mostly vanished place, it is also a blueprint for how other fallen, forgotten cities might be reinvigorated by the right kind of attention. It may be fascinating to view the "ruin porn" of places like Detroit, but it is anything but inspirational.

A book cannot save a city, but it can prove that a city is worth saving. It would be a fine thing if more writers and observers shared Kennedy's magnetic attraction to home and his ability to transfigure it. It is easy, if one has talent, to ride it out of town and to laugh at those unlucky peasants left behind. Yet often one is forfeiting an incredible inheritance, a wealth of history and poetry unknown to outsiders. *Ironweed's* Francis Phelan is a man tormented by ghosts of Albany past; he is doomed to wander Albany, despite himself. Phelan's creator, however, collected ghosts as boon companions, and learned everything they had to tell. This is how a writer should honor his birthplace—by giving life and voice to the dead, for their good and for all of ours. **CJR**

STEFAN BECK writes about fiction and other subjects for *The New Criterion*, *The Weekly Standard*, *Barnes & Noble Review*, and elsewhere.

Flag on the play

Why a great sportswriter blew the story of a lifetime;
the undoing of Joe Paterno

BY TIM MARCHMAN

FOR THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT SPORTS AND SPORTS WRITING, THE RECENT PUBLICATION of Joe Posnanski's book on the late Penn State football coach Joe Paterno was perhaps the event of the summer. Posnanski, a former *Sports Illustrated* columnist held by many to be the best sportswriter in the country, originally had planned to shadow Paterno during what would likely be the last of his 62 seasons as a coach, uncovering the secrets of his admirable longevity and even more admirable decency.

Instead, Posnanski found himself in State College, PA, in the fall of 2011, watching as the national debate shifted from Paterno's place among the great sports coaches to whether he had actively covered up a series of child rapes committed by longtime assistant Jerry Sandusky. This ruined Posnanski's original concept of writing a heartwarming Father's Day paean to the triumph of the human spirit; it also left him as the only reporter on the inside of a transcendent story of power and corruption. No sportswriter in living memory has had such an opportunity.

The book, sad to say, landed with a wet thud. The critical consensus was that Posnanski had done little with his unique access to his subject, blowing a chance to write the definitive book on the worst scandal in the history of American sports. Few readers really cared about Paterno's working-class Brooklyn roots, or the love of literature he'd developed at Brown University, or how various Chamber of Commerce types who had played for him felt that his hard coaching had, in retrospect, turned them into men. They wanted to know what Paterno knew about Sandusky and when, and whether his handling of the scandal was tied to lifelong patterns of behavior. Treating the scandal as one incident in a long, full life rather than something that will forever define Paterno, Posnanski hinted at answers, but never delivered them.

Left implicit in most of the reviews was the main subject of gossip among sportswriters prior to the book's release: Of all the people who might have written this book, Joe Posnanski might have been the one least suited to it. The same gifts that put him in a position to get the story—fluency, a knack for finding uplift in unlikely places, a conciliatory spirit—also left him unable to tell it.

This was troubling, because these gifts aren't just those of a good writer, but a good person. His work creates an easy intimacy and a sense that you're in the hands of a decent man, which is true. (I've had reason to ask Posnanski for several favors over the years, and found him to be exceptionally generous.) Still, reading *Paterno*, it was hard not to ask a dour question: If the traits that make someone a top sportswriter simultaneously leave him unable to master a story of this

importance, just what has gone wrong with sports writing?

Posnanski is an odd fit for the role of sports writing's avatar, less because of what he is than what he isn't. A longtime sports columnist for the *Kansas City Star*, he became nationally prominent in the late aughts with the publication of *The Soul of Baseball*, a book about his road trips with Negro Leagues legend Buck O'Neil, and a well-read blog that explained traditionalists to younger, more analytical fans and vice versa without condescending to either. In a news cycle increasingly dominated by shouty fools issuing witless "takes" on command, he stood out for not shouting and not being a fool.

He eventually landed at *Sports Illustrated*, where he was a featured columnist, a sort of counter to ESPN's Bill Simmons. As a national voice, Posnanski did well, writing faster than anyone better, better than anyone faster, and longer than almost everyone. (Counting what he posted on his blog and published in *Sports Illustrated* in August 2011, as he was packing for State College, you get about 40,000 words spread over a couple dozen articles on golf, postage stamps, the relative power of statistics and narrative in sports, a novel by former Buffalo Bills coach Marv Levy, the myth of pressure, and, mostly, baseball.) The broader platform did, though, expose some shortcuts to which he was prone.

The novelist John Gardner defined sentimentality as "the attempt to get some effect without providing due cause." For Posnanski, this is a working method. Take as an example a typical good Posnanski piece, a 3,500-word blog post from December 2010 about the brilliant pitcher Zack Greinke. At the time there was a lot of talk about whether the morbidly lousy Kansas City Royals would trade him to a team in a bigger city, and whether Greinke, who has struggled with social anxiety disorder and depression, could handle big crowds and the expectation to win.

Posnanski drew on his years covering Greinke for the *Star* to argue that the one place the pitcher felt truly comfortable was the pitcher's mound, and that crowds and the press didn't bother him at all. It was a sensitive, smart, and

well-reported piece; it was also structured around a conceit comparing Greinke to Chauncey, the idiot hero of Hal Ashby's 1979 film *Being There*.

The effect Posnanski is after, and the one he gets if you're not reading attentively, is to present Greinke as a very recognizable type, who exposes the grasping absurdity of everything around him just by staying true to his own narrow genius. The problem, though, is that Greinke isn't some fictionalized idiot savant, but a talented player dealing with an illness he shares with millions of other Americans. Rather than fully work through the implications of that, Posnanski sentimentalizes Greinke, which is kinder than depicting him as a coward, but hardly more accurate.

Taking in a lot of Posnanski's writing at once, you see this disjuncture between cause and effect recur so often that it comes to seem like a trick. The trick is predicated on the seemingly unconventional take (Zack Greinke is in fact better suited for the pressures of baseball than anyone else!), which makes it especially galling when that take is pure vanilla. One of the central mysteries of Joe Paterno's life, for example, was why he kept coaching for at least a decade after he should have retired.

"His hearing went," Posnanski writes in *Paterno*. "His mobility went. His energy went. But his mind stayed sharp, his memory too, and he kept on going even when his age had become a national punch line. He coached right up to the scandal that led to his firing and the cancer that led to his death.

"Why did he keep coaching? There are no shortage of theories. Ego? A loss of perspective? Or was it simply that he was human? 'Joe refused to admit he was getting old,' one friend said. 'Isn't that the most human thing of all?'"

One is tempted to answer, "Well, no, not really." Only in fields that offer the illusion of youth or the reality of power—sports, entertainment, politics—is it normal to reach a Paternoesque denial of the reality of age. In the mentions of ego and loss of perspective Posnanski tacitly admits this, but when it comes to the part where he ought to be offering some actual insight, there is only something near

a copout, one reminiscent of the infamous "secret" at the heart of Simmons's *The Book of Basketball*. ("The secret of basketball," Isaiah Thomas tells him, "is that it's not about basketball.")

This sort of flaw mars *Paterno*, which brims with telling details that simply don't align with its central argument that Paterno was a good man who, in an uncharacteristic lapse, failed to see what was right before him. Many

the involvement of teams in the transnational workings of dirty capital—not only isn't broken by star columnists, but is rarely seriously addressed by them. Those stories require quiet concentration, an ability to ignore the great raving noise machine and focus on small details and, most of all, time—the one thing a star never has. That's a shame for anyone who cares about sports, and about journalism.

There's a reason why the hardest news in sports not only isn't broken by star columnists, but is rarely seriously addressed by them.

reviewers rightly fixed on a story about the coach calling his daughter a thief and then storming out of a restaurant after she'd had the nerve to pick a cucumber off her sister's plate. As with Greinke, Posnanski shies away from the more difficult conclusions of his own reporting and turns to wistful, easily understood truisms. Polemic can work this way. Narrative can't.

Of course, Posnanski isn't the only sportswriter who tends toward sentimentality and sometimes allows platitudes about the human spirit to stand in for hard explanations of difficult concepts. Between the speed of the news cycle and the demand that star columnists produce a volume of copy that often makes serious reporting or reflection impossible, taking those shortcuts is basically the only way to get the work done. This isn't new—a hundred years ago, sportswriters worked under similar deadline pressures and were just as apt to express opinions on things they knew nothing about. What's changed is the sheer amount of writing demanded in an age when there are no hard physical limits on word counts. The soup may sometimes be thin, but the chefs will make up for it in volume.

Techniques that work for day-to-day sports coverage, though, can fail miserably when used to handle a serious, real-world news story. There is a reason why the hardest news in sports—stories of concussions, doping scandals,

The failure of one of America's finest sportswriters to do anything really meaningful with unique access to the main players in the biggest sports story of his generation would ideally prompt changes. Editors might grant their better stylists more time to do careful work. Columnists might write less often but more thoroughly, trusting their readers to come up with their own opinions on the latest in the infinite series of vital debates over postseason awards and Halls of Fame. The public might even become more demanding.

While any of that might yet happen, I'd doubt it. Posnanski's book was published on August 21. Within a few days he ran a 5,000-word piece on a baseball statistic, two 2,000-word pieces on baseball's Hall of Fame, and another on the heartwarming story of how his iPad was lost ("it was one of those moments—and there are many throughout childhood, into college, into early adulthood, into mid-life, on and on—when the world becomes just a little bit darker place") and then returned to him. His new website Sports on Earth, a rival to Simmons's Grantland, also went live. Over the next few weeks its pages filled with content. A lot of it was good. Most of the writers sounded a little bit like Posnanski. **CJR**

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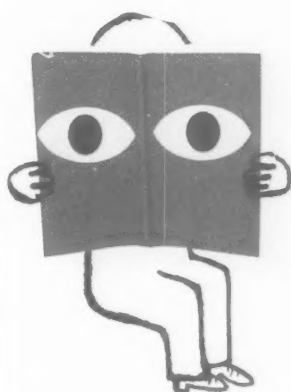
BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

Out of the News: Former Journalists Discuss a Profession in Crisis

By Celia Viggo Wexler
McFarland & Company
195 pages
\$40 paperbound

CELIA VIGGO WEXLER LEFT newspaper journalism in the 1980s for an unfashionable reason, motherhood. She did not return, but instead found compelling new ways to employ a journalist's skills, becoming a writer/lobbyist for Common Cause and a lobbyist for the Union of Concerned Scientists. She has now gathered the stories of 11 journalists more or less of her generation—that is, some of the elite of the cohort that entered journalism in the 1970s and faced the seismic changes of the three subsequent decades. Like Wexler, they have moved on, sometimes by choice, sometimes not. Some voluntarily left enviable positions with such high-profile employers as CBS and *The New York Times*. If the 11 have anything in common it is a feeling that their best work as journalists was being devalued. One of the most vivid profiles is that of David Simon, who fought with the new managers of his newspaper, *The Baltimore Sun*, about better ways to report on Baltimore's underclasses; in the end, he went Hollywood and gained fame as creator of the HBO series, *The Wire*. Others had more complicated paths, landing here and there, always in search of



opportunities that would permit them to use their talents more effectively. Some taught; some turned to nonprofit journalism; some became advocates of worthy causes. One, Chuck Lewis, founded the Center for Public Integrity and won a MacArthur fellowship. These stories leave the reader with the feeling that this was a group that mainstream journalism could ill afford to lose, but could not hold.

The Way the World Works: Essays

By Nicholson Baker
Simon & Schuster
317 pages
\$25

AMONG THOSE WHO LOVE old newspapers, Nicholson Baker is known as the chief demonstrator against the wholesale destruction by libraries of millions of tons of newsprint, replaced by microfilm or scans, which were a paltry substitute for the real thing. Baker's *Double Fold*, published in 2001, sounded the alarm. This new collection contains two updates: That same year, he delivered remarks on the merits of preserving

paper, printed here, at the dedication of a new Duke University library storage facility. Three years later, Duke accepted for storage about 50 tons of newspaper files Baker had acquired, and there they remain in their original state. He offers also the introduction

to *The World on Sunday* (2005), a rich collection compiled by Baker and his wife, Margaret Brentano, of color reproductions created from what he believed to be the last intact file of Joseph Pulitzer's *Sunday World*. The rest of this collection addresses a variety of other topics, among them the licentious New York press of the 1840s, Wikipedia, Kindle, and violent video games. Not least, he reprints his fine essay on Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, first published in *CJR* in July/August 2009 and titled here "Defoe, Truthteller."

The Stammering Century

By Gilbert Seldes
Introduction by Greil Marcus
New York Review of Books
414 pages
\$18.95 paperbound

IN INTRODUCING AN earlier reprint edition of *The Stammering Century*, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. placed the critic and editor Gilbert Seldes among the gifted amateurs (non-academics) of the 1920s—Bernard de Voto, Constance Rourke, Lewis Mumford and others—who brought a fresh temper

and spirit to the writing of American history. This 1928 work, newly issued by *New York Review Books*, offers 21st-century readers many episodes of mordant amusement. Seldes (1893–1970), younger brother of the famed journalist George Seldes, did not set out to write the conventional story of the American march through the 19th century. Taking his title from a phrase coined by Horace Greeley to characterize the incoherence of the age, he asserts early that this is an account of the underside or backside of history, the religious fevers, utopian colonies, paths to perfection, inspired by "sour fanatics, crackbrained enthusiasts, monomaniacs, epileptics, and mountebanks." Some of the names are remembered today—the Alcotts, Mary Baker Eddy, the Beechers among them—but who remembers the murderous Robert Matthews ("Matthias"), P.P. Quimby, or Lorenzo Dow? Had he been given the opportunity, H.L. Mencken might have used this crowd as fodder for a mighty polemic. But Seldes lets them speak in their own words, be they fools or sages. Greil Marcus concludes in his introduction that the work "remains a bible, a grand genealogy of American dreaming in action." **CJR**

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The future's so bright...

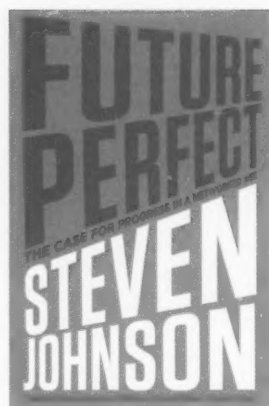
How to save the world while paying people with beer and hugs

BY JUSTIN PETERS

IN EARLY 2012, A MUSICIAN NAMED Amanda Palmer took to Kickstarter to ask her fans for \$100,000. Palmer, a veteran of the major-label system, was raising money to independently release her new album. "since [sic] i'm now without a giant label to front the gazillions of dollars that it always takes to manufacture and promote a record this big, I'm coming to you to gather funds so that i [sic] have the capital to put it out with a huge fucking bang," she wrote in her pitch.

Bang. By the end of the Kickstarter campaign, Palmer had raised \$1.2 million, about a third of it in donations of \$100 or less, and, in effect, validated a new model of funding the arts. "THIS IS THE FUTURE OF MUSIC," Palmer asserted in a video promoting her fundraising effort. And who would disagree? As Steven Johnson puts it in his new book, *Future Perfect*, sites like Kickstarter help germinate passion projects that legacy studio systems wouldn't touch. With Kickstarter, he writes, "interesting, provocative, polished, ambitious ideas get funding; boring or trivial or spammy ones don't."

Interesting, provocative, polished ideas, and better strategies for encouraging them, are Johnson's subject matter in *Future Perfect*, a preternaturally optimistic manifesto arguing that the modern world is pretty great, and that peer networks are making it even better.



Future Perfect: The Case for Progress in a Networked Age
By Steven Johnson
Riverhead Books
233 pages, \$26.95

Johnson is a tech journalist, entrepreneur, and prolific author who over the last 15 years has written eight books, all of the big-idea variety. His latest is an attempt to articulate the values of peer progressivism, a vaguely libertarian ideology apparently born out of TED conferences, Twitter chats, and creative-class dinner parties. "Hooray for crowdsourcing" is the gist of it. "We believe in social progress, and we believe the most powerful tool to advance the cause of progress is the peer network," he writes. "We are peer progressives."

Johnson and the peer progressives see the Internet not just as a triumph of network architecture, but a milestone in political philosophy, a response to ineffective statist strategies for organizing systems and wielding power. Governments and other large organizations tend to rely on small, centralized groups of "idea men," who are often out of touch with their constituents; take the high-rise housing projects of the 1960s, for instance, conceived by central planners with little apparent consideration of how these towers might ultimately suit their communities.

Peer progressive strategies, on the other hand, encourage group input and participation from the margins. A peer-progressive housing strategy, for example, might ask community members to guide the redevelopment process. The idea has applications everywhere. As Johnson explains it, "a growing number of us have started to think that the core principles that governed the design of the Net could be applied to solve different kinds of problems—the problems that confront neighborhoods, artists, drug companies, parents, schools."

If you've ever used Twitter or attended a future-of-news conference, you will recognize the peer progressives. They are enthusiastic anecdotalists and soothsayers who are often blind to the ultimate implications of their advice. Johnson eschews the "utopian" label, but he isn't convincing. As he describes it, peer progressivism necessitates unshakable faith in the impending arrival of the best of all possible worlds.

But is that faith justified? It is tempting to criticize Johnson on the fact that most of the advances and breakthroughs he cites aren't particularly substantial. (He really loves Kickstarter, and the white-people art projects in which it specializes.) Johnson, though, acknowledges that peer progressivism is young, and hasn't yet produced much of widespread value. It's not the product that matters; it's the process.

"When a need arises in society that goes unmet, our first impulse should be to build a peer network that solves that problem," writes Johnson, and he's full of ideas to that end. Why not remake the National Endowment for the Arts on a Kickstarter model? Or let uninformed

voters assign their votes to better-informed proxies? Wouldn't it be great if New York City's 311 call system were to evolve so that "someday a descendant of 311 will allow small groups of citizens to self-organize teams to repair potholes on neighborhood streets, bypassing government intervention altogether"?

That last sentence gets at the major problem I have with this book. When Johnson argues that peer networks are making the world better, he generally means that things are getting better for people like Steven Johnson: comfortable college graduates from good neighborhoods with white-collar jobs that afford them the time to dick around on the Internet and repair potholes for fun. Johnson and his ilk assume as a matter of course that these advances will eventually trickle down to the lands that broadband forgot—and maybe so. But in the meantime, the state of progress is being defined by a group of isolated technophiles with little apparent interest in, or contact with, this country's permanent underclass.

Peer-progressive strategies often appear contingent on some theoretical endless supply of citizens eager to pitch in and perform tasks that people were once paid to do. So let's assume we get to the point where this pothole team exists. It's possible that, with potholes under control in rich neighborhoods, cities might then redirect their resources to repairing roads in the slums. But it's just as likely, if not more so, that all this volunteer labor will just encourage cities to trim public employees from the payroll. Peer progressivism empowers managers and gentrifiers first and foremost, while devaluing labor by falsely equating a *sense* of ownership with actual ownership.

These issues don't negate Johnson's arguments, but they complicate them, and any serious attempt to articulate a political philosophy would address, or at least acknowledge, these complications. By so completely ignoring them, Johnson assures that his book will be ignored by serious people—which makes me wonder who, exactly, this book is written for. A section about Whole Foods Market offers a clue. In a chapter titled "Conscious Capitalism," Johnson praises Whole Foods, the country's best-known organic grocer, as an exemplar

***Future Perfect* is a business book in a pop-philosophy wrapper.**

of peer-progressive management strategies. Whole Foods gives its individual stores a say in how they are run, and lets employees earn performance-based bonuses and share those bonuses with deserving peers. The company has flattened its hierarchy, removing barriers that might prevent managers from connecting with their staff.

It's nice that Whole Foods employees can earn a bonus for being speed demons on the hot bar. But they would be better off if they worked under a collectively bargained contract that protected them from being fired for no cause, or pressured into performing additional duties without additional compensation, or any number of things that real-life Whole Foods employees have complained about. Whereas Johnson looks at Whole Foods Market and sees a company that listens, I see one that refuses to hear its workers' calls to unionize; a company whose owner has bashed organized labor in the press, stalled union drives, and claimed that binding arbitration is un-American.

Praising Whole Foods's progressive policies while completely ignoring its reactionary ones makes it clear whose side Johnson is on. Strip away all the utopian rhetoric, and Johnson is peddling management strategies—ways that employers can get something for nothing. He writes that peer progressives want to "reward people for coming up with good ideas—and reward them for sharing those ideas." Good! But peer progressives seem uninterested in rewarding people for just doing their jobs—the point of *actual* Progressivism. Johnson is offering the intellectual justification for rolling back real-world worker protections in exchange for some squishy sense of belonging and participation.

Peer networks are fascinating, dense concepts, and there is a serious book to be written about their potential for

changing the world. But *Future Perfect* is a business book in a pop-philosophy wrapper, and I suspect it was written largely to maintain the author's viability on the keynote circuit. The website of Johnson's lecture agency, the Leigh Bureau, features glowing reviews from his satisfied corporate clients: "one of the world's largest food companies," "a Fortune 50 company," "a major computer firm." And, indeed, the book is superficially articulate in a way that probably sounds best when read aloud from behind a lectern.

Since Johnson's entire book relies on anecdotal evidence, I feel comfortable mustering some of my own in response. In August 2012, with her new solo album on the verge of release, Amanda Palmer took to the Internet again with another request. This time, she was looking for professional-caliber string musicians to play for free on her tour. "we [sic] will feed you beer, hug/high-five you up and down (pick your poison), give you merch, and thank you mightily for adding to the big noise we are planning to make," she wrote.

The public reaction this time wasn't as positive, with many surprised that a woman who raised \$1.2 million couldn't afford to pay professional musicians for their time. Palmer, under national media scrutiny, ultimately decided to pay the musicians, which is perhaps a sign that crowdfunding allows fans some oversight on the projects they support. But I think it's worth examining Palmer's initial reaction. Peer progressivism doesn't just *incidentally* encourage the use of free labor. The entire system relies on it. First you try it, then you depend on it, then the whole industry depends on it, and then there is no industry.

The peer progressives, one suspects, would be content if everyone in their networks were paid in beer and hugs. But somebody's still earning money, be it Amanda Palmer, Whole Foods CEO John Mackey, or Steven Johnson—who sits on the advisory boards of Patch and Meetup.com, owns a \$2.7 million house in Marin County, and will probably be back with another page-turner in 2014. I can see why the future looks perfect to him. **CJR**

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Color bind

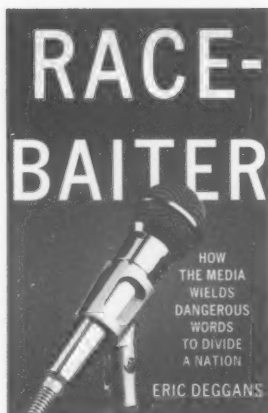
When white men and three networks ruled the media, coverage of race was...better? Damn you, Internet!

BY AMANDA HESS

LAST SUMMER, GAWKER ASKED VETERAN news anchor Dan Rather to review Aaron Sorkin's new television series *The Newsroom*. It was an inspired choice. In *The Newsroom*, Sorkin feeds on nostalgia for newsmen like Rather—the mythical authoritative anchor who delivered objective facts to the American people in a simpler time, before blogs.

Perhaps predictably, Rather loved the show, giving it six stars on a five-star scale. "I'm aware that my musings run counter to some of the more prominent early reviews in high-profile publications such as *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*," he wrote in an introductory note to his review of the show's first episode. "But with all due respect...I just don't think they 'get it'; they've somehow missed the breadth, depth and 'got it right' qualities—and importance—of *Newsroom*. Maybe it's because they are print people."

So Dan Rather is biased. Why wouldn't he be? He used to hold court behind an anchor desk in a three-man field; now, he jockeys for attention on an entertainment television channel called AXS TV. Less clear is why that bygone era of TV journalism—the news dominated by three networks, each dominated by white men, none asked to disclose their own prejudices—still looks so good to media critic Eric Deggans, whose new book, *Race-Baiter: How the Media Wields Dangerous Words to Divide a Nation*, picks apart the racial



Race Baiter: How the Media Wields Dangerous Words to Divide a Nation

By Eric Deggans
Palgrave MacMillan
288 pages, \$28

biases inherent in today's new media landscape, and casts a strangely rosy view of the old news monoliths.

Deggans is a "print person"—he was the original media critic at the *St. Petersburg Times* (now the *Tampa Bay Times*)—but he's also a TV guy who has spent much of his 20-year-plus career critiquing that medium. In his book, he argues that increasingly opinion-driven, niche-marketed news networks have created a modern media landscape that

"often works to feed our fears, prejudices, and hate toward each other."

He also argues that media's role as racial instigator is a recent development. "Before the rise of niche outlets such as cable TV, satellite radio, websites, and social media platforms," he writes, "big media outlets made their money by seeking to serve huge, diverse audiences and selling advertisers access to them, creating a shared cultural dialog in the process." In the absence of unifying voices like Rather's, rival opinion-makers have emerged—Bill O'Reilly v. Al Sharpton, Glenn Beck v. Keith Olbermann, Sean Hannity v. Rachel Maddow—each feeding off the other's arguments. (Typically, one side accuses the other of racism; the other retorts that their antagonists are "race-baiters," a term O'Reilly himself has applied to Deggans.) "The ongoing fragmentation of media—with Facebook, Twitter, iPods, YouTube sites, and Internet-accessible smartphones allowing users to create their own, custom-tailored media worlds—has only made it all worse," he writes. "In a fragmented media culture, hate sells."

Deggans doesn't clarify how iPods are stoking racial hatred in the United States. Instead, he turns to Rather, who just joined Twitter this summer, has amassed 11,000 followers (1/200th of Rachel Maddow's following), and is 81 years old. In a conversation with Deggans during the 2012 GOP primary, Rather "admitted to feeling the influence of online media on the reporting process"—as if by engaging with social media, Rather had committed some sin for which he needed to atone. Paraphrasing Rather, Deggans writes that in journalism's "new, social media-fueled environment...race issues are almost the new 'third rail' of political discourse—considered dangerous to discuss head on, because any gaffe can spread 'like mildew in a damp basement.'"

It's true that when Dan Rather's Twitter feed blows up with minute dissections of a candidate's every racially charged word, it makes it difficult for politicians and journalists to speak openly and honestly about race. Then again, when in American history has open dialogue about race been a hallmark of our television news discourse? And how does intense and visible

public engagement on the issue constitute a step backward? Deggans notes that Rather "covered the Civil Rights movement" in his time at CBS. The implication is that everything was better when just one guy was leading the discussion—and when it was spat out on television, instead of unfurling in many directions online.

Deggans makes that view explicit in his interview with another white male anchor, Brian Williams. After speaking with Williams about his struggle to persuade NBC to continue covering Hurricane Katrina after the waters had receded, Deggans writes that the "experience left Williams yearning for the days when journalists could set the world's news agenda, almost unilaterally." (No shit?) "The world you and I grew up in—I'm 51 years old," Williams says. "Three channels on TV. The president spoke, you didn't watch anything else. You wouldn't think about it. Men

Journalists of color have lost one out of four jobs in the industry's extensive layoffs.

landed on the moon, a global event. I'd like to see what kind of audience share it would get today. Getting people's attention is hard."

We're expected to believe that were we to grant total control to a guy like Williams, he'd do the right thing. And in Deggans's argument, even opening up the news elite to a broader base of potential story sources leads to negative consequences. Tom Rosenstiel of the Project for Excellence in Journalism tells Deggans, "In an earlier era, where media was more homogenous, you had to persuade journalists directly to give you coverage." But now, "in this more varied media culture, you can get noticed by friendlier media and eventually get coverage from [outlets] who are skeptical of you, because you've reached a point of prominence." Deggans uses

the quote to explain the Web-to-network success of the late great media-baiter Andrew Breitbart, and his distorted videos of minor, liberally aligned figures.

But the same tactics can be used to champion the causes of any underserved minorities, not just conservative obfuscators. The killing of Trayvon Martin was "a story that lived on social media until the audio of the 911 call surfaced, when it became a major mainstream story," Rosenstiel told me via email. "The [Komen Foundation] story is another example. It might have taken weeks for the protest among pro-choice advocates to surface in an earlier era. . . In this instance, the reaction on Twitter and elsewhere in social media took just days, and reporters knew about it in almost real time by monitoring that conversation."

Still, it's true that racial bias has persevered even as media technologies have evolved. And for the uninitiated, Deggans's book offers a decent primer for these evolving dynamics. Though the US population is diversifying at a steady clip, the ranks of television journalists are not. When black anchors do make it behind the desk, they're more likely to be figureheads speaking to specific demographics than traditional journalists trusted to speak for all Americans. Consider MSNBC contributor Al Sharpton, who Deggans notes leveraged his media role to both lead and report on a rally for Trayvon Martin. Off the air, the view is grimmer: Since the recession, journalists of color have lost one out of four jobs in the industry's extensive layoffs. Media responses to Martin's death, Obama's presidency, and Herman Cain's presidential candidacy all offer case studies in the challenges of modern reporting on race, particularly when the issue is only raised in "a time of crisis."

Race-Baiter seems primed to occupy the shelf next to intro-to-media-crit syllabus staples like Jennifer Pozner's *Reality Bites Back*. Unfortunately, most students won't find their own media diets reflected in *Race-Baiter's* critique, which is focused on legacy platforms like cable TV news, network television, even talk radio. The Internet is an afterthought in Deggans's book—even though online sources now constitute

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

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the critic's biggest competitors. On the Internet, media criticism comes built into the very processing of the news—through comments sections, anti-racist blogs that break from the partisan media mold, Twitter @ replies, or the work of pros like Deggans himself.

In a media environment where the critiques begin as soon as the news breaks, a book like this ought to offer more interesting narratives, better interviews, and deeper insights than its online competitors. Instead, reading *Race-Baiter* feels a lot like browsing the "related links" section of a critical race blog; the book never builds to a coherent argument. Though Deggans interviews behind-the-scenes figures like the Trayvon Martin family's PR rep and in-the-spotlight guys like embattled radio and TV commentator Juan Williams, he fails to process their broader social relevance. Mostly, though, he fails to recognize that the media game those figures are playing will soon be obsolete.

The members of my generation are not TV people or print people—we are Internet people. We are about as likely to watch Bill O'Reilly as we are to invest in gold bars. But in Deggans's work, new media consumption never takes center stage—it's always employed as the setup for successes like Breitbart's or failures like Limbaugh's. Deggans's book is ostensibly an overview of media attitudes toward race in the 21st century, but it more or less dismisses the Internet as a place where stories circulate in an attempt to influence the "mainstream." In September, 9.6 million Americans visited Gawker in one week. The Internet is the mainstream.

At nearly the last page, Deggans allows that "online outlets can...be a cure for our 'horizontal segregation,'" and don't always make everything worse. For me, the potential positive power of the Internet is no big reveal. I don't know if the Internet offers more opportunities for journalists of color than the traditional avenues do. But I refuse to just believe it's worse than the old model, without a thorough accounting. **CJR**

AMANDA HESS is a writer and editor in Los Angeles who focuses on the intersection of sex, youth culture, and technology. She is a co-founder of Tomorrow Magazine and a Slate contributor. Follow her @amandahess.

BY MICHAEL SCHUDSON AND KATHERINE FINK

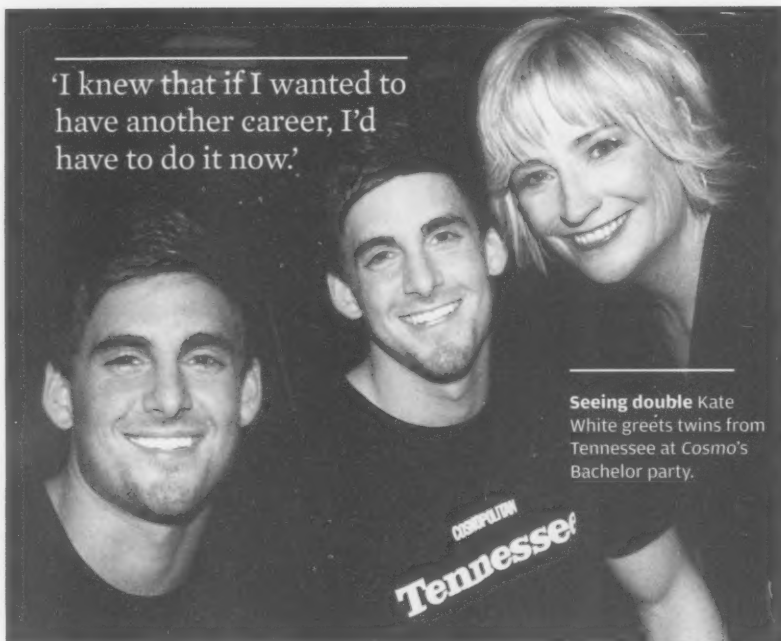
Like many other spritely online startups in news, The Lens is small (nine employees and a \$480,000 budget in 2012) and funded primarily by foundations (Knight, Open Society Foundations, and others). The Lens is also like many other startups in that it has dedicated itself not to replicate legacy media, but to invest in what those outlets often do not: investigative reporting. And again, like

But The Lens grew out of an enterprising citizen-journalist blog that doggedly pursued bureaucratic snafus in New Orleans's post-Katrina home rebuilding efforts. When the blog sought to grow into a more fully resourced news organization, it conceived itself as "a 'snarky' blog on land use" and applied to the Open Society Foundations for funding. The Open Society advised The Lens to shift from a partnership of blogging-and-reporting citizens to a more conventional news model, complete with a beat system, professional editors with print-journalism credentials, and a board of directors (which Ostertag joined after completing his research for his paper). The Lens took the advice

The Lens has garnered local journalism prizes and even notable national awards, but if a journalistic newcomer cannot gain traction with funders, sources, partners, and audiences when it departs from basic elements in conventional newsgathering, does it have to abandon the dream of innovation? Or should we begin to wonder if “innovation” is itself, far from a synonym for liberty, a new conceptual straitjacket? **CJR**

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'I knew that if I wanted to have another career, I'd have to do it now.'



Seeing double Kate White greets twins from Tennessee at Cosmo's Bachelor party.

EXIT INTERVIEW

'How to Get On With Your Life'

IT TAKES GUTS TO QUIT A JOB RUNNING THE WORLD'S BEST-SELLING WOMEN'S magazine. But **Kate White** has long embodied the "fun fearless female" ethos of *Cosmopolitan*, which she edited for the past 14 years. White resigned in September, shortly after *The New York Times* noted that the 100 million readers of the brand's 64 editions, confederated, would add up to the world's 12th-largest country. A master of the irresistible headline, White has published six Bailey Weggins mystery novels and already has a new book out (*I Shouldn't Be Telling You This: Success Secrets Every Gutsy Girl Should Know*). *CJR's* **Cyndi Stivers** emailed with White in October.

Why did you decide to leave? I loved my time at *Cosmo*, but I started to feel restless, even a little grouchy at times—which I rarely am at work—and it was a sign I was ready for a fresh adventure. And I had the chance to leave at a point when *Cosmo* was No. 1 and was in good shape for the future. Plus, I really believe there are windows in our careers, and you have to be willing to leap at a certain time or it might be too late. I knew that if I wanted to have another career, I'd have to do it now.

What milestones are you proudest of? I took a mature brand and helped reinvent it successfully for a new century. We outsold our nearest competitor, *Glamour*, by over a million copies each month on the newsstand. I'm also really proud of the Practice Safe Sun Campaign we started in 2006 [to publicize] that melanoma was the fastest growing cancer for women in their twenties. I love that 54 percent of readers said they changed their sun-related behavior because of our campaign.

What's your favorite *Cosmo* coverline ever? And how about your best display-type double entendre? So hard to choose. I love so many of them. Favorite double entendre? Maybe "How to Deal with an Iffy Stiffy." We found that the articles that got

the best traffic on *Cosmo's* website had titles similar to the highest-rated titles and coverlines for the magazine. The key is to figure out the reader need you want to tap into. The more important need, the better the coverline will be. And try build the line around where the universal intersects with the specific. Examples: "Why Men Cheat in August," "The Sex Article You Must Read With Your Boyfriend," and "How to Lose Weight While You Eat."

In what position of your career did you learn the most? I learned the most running *Cosmo*. When I saw that the stakes were so high, I realized I had to both lead and learn.

Can you talk about the '70s, working with Art Cooper at *Family Weekly* [a Sunday newspaper supplement]? Wasn't David Granger there too? Art was such a smart and charismatic boss. Eliot Kaplan worked with me there, right out of journalism school. He went on to edit *Philadelphia* magazine and is now the talent hunter at Hearst. Ellen Kunes, the editor of *Health*, worked with us, too. Dave Granger, editor of *Esquire*, came after Art left. The bottom line: Sometimes at a small, less-than-glamorous place you get the chance to do far more than you would at a big place.

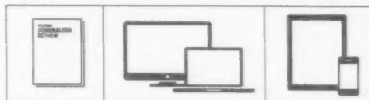
Describe your new daily routine. It's still a work in progress, but I love being more of an entrepreneur. It's something I always dreamed of. My days right now are a mix of speeches, book promotion, writing, projects, and spending far more time with my husband. We bought a home in Uruguay a few years ago, and we plan to spend five weeks there this winter, working remotely.

What's the best advice you've picked up along the way? A great piece of advice came from the fantastic journalist Ron Rosenbaum, who, funnily enough, had [credited it to *Cosmo* foremother] Helen Gurley Brown. It's called the pregnant pause: When someone tells you something, don't rush to fill the vacuum. Say nothing. Do not pounce. Let them fill the vacuum. And they will often say the most amazing thing they hadn't intended to say. **CJR**

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